

LIGHT
FROM
THE
LOWLY







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BLESSED GENTIL.—Page 35.

LIGHT FROM THE LOWLY

OR

Lives of Persons who sanctified themselves in
humble positions

BY THE

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TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH

BY THE

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With Twelve Illustrations

BY

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VOL. I.

DUBLIN

M. H. GILL AND SON

50 UPPER SACKVILLE STREET

1884



Nihil Obstat :

P. J. TYNAN, S.T.D.

Imprimatur :

✠ E. CARD. MAC CABE,

ARCHIEPISCOPUS DUBLINENSIS,

HIBERNIÆ PRIMAS.

75553

INTRODUCTION.



FARMER, mason, baker, rope-maker, or whatever else you be, who, obliged as you are to gain your bread with the sweat of your brow, seek a momentary recreation in the reading of these pages, you surely are not one of those who see in their ordinary labour an obstacle to rise to the pinnacle of Christian sanctity. If, however, you unfortunately be a prey to so pernicious an error, shake it off, for God's sake, for your state of life, humble as it may appear in the eyes of the world, is very different, indeed, from what the mortal enemy of your soul represents it. The Lord in His ineffable designs, guided by His loving and paternal providence, had it laid out for you from

all eternity as the most suitable means for you to attain the degree of sanctity to which He desired to raise you.

This world, that it present to our eyes all the beauty its Divine Maker intended for His glory or the manifestation of His incomparable perfections, stands in no less need of the trade you follow than of the sceptre swayed by monarchs. Each one's glory, then, is not exactly in the dignity of the position he holds, but in filling it according to the beneficent plans of the Creator. The world is compared to a great theatre, in which is represented the sublime drama of the divine glorification. In it all mortals are at once spectators and actors, and they should perform the part entrusted to them by that sovereign Director who knows thoroughly well the talents and capacity of each. And just as if one act the part of a servant better than another does that of an emperor, the latter is hissed by the audience, whilst the former receives applause from all quarters, so God, the wisest and most impartial of judges, does not so much regard in us the personage we represent—one

a beggar, another a landlord, this one a religious, that one a secular—as He does the perfection with which we discharge our duty ; and it is according to the latter He rewards us when death drops the curtain, and the scene of this world closes for mortal man.

These are the consoling truths which Catholicity teaches us. In the eyes of men, who do not penetrate beyond the surface, those who occupy brilliant positions are alone worthy of praise and admiration ; but in the eyes of God, who sounds the depths of the human heart, and gives to each thing its just and true value, the humble who discharge with fidelity their respective duties, though never so despicable, have a claim on equal estimation. He is an impartial and just Judge, and whilst in His divine tribunal He reprovcs and condemns all those who, puffed up with the dignity of their office, forget to discharge its duties, He at the same time ennobles and glorifies those who, in their laborious toil, know how to raise their eyes and their heart to Him whose glory it is to be called the Father of the poor.

Courage, then, Christian workman, for you can be a saint, and a great saint, if you co-operate with the graces the Lord will pour out on your soul according to the measure of your correspondence. Thus only shall you form part of that royal people, who in the kingdom of glory all reign with Jesus Christ. A sweet and grand thing it is to die in defence of religion and country, but be not deceived by subversive doctrines, which sanctify anti-Catholic rebellion; listen not to the voice of those who exaggerate your dignity by deifying labour, for they are only homicidal sirens, who try to decoy you into becoming food for powder, that they may make a stepping-stone of your corpse to the employment and dignity they ambition. They apparently glorify you in their writings and speeches, but in reality they lower you; for they make your noble labour daily more irksome to you, and subject you to the slavery of filthy passions. Only in Catholicity does labour find its true grandeur, for in it, and only in it, does labour serve the real Christian as a means to satisfy the debts contracted with the divine justice, and as a

merit to gain eternal glory. Every drop of sweat you lose in your Christian labour will be converted in heaven into a pearl to adorn your eternal crown. Who wonders now that the ancient Catalans carved on their tombstones the implements of their arts—this one the mould, that one the scissors, another the shuttle—as signs of true and imperishable nobility? Love, then, with holy pride the profession to which God has called you; labour to discharge its duties as the Almighty expects from you, and you will reach a degree of sanctity much higher than you dream of.

To convince you, not by argument, but by experience, I am going to place before you the examples of illustrious Christians, who in the midst of occupations analogous to yours, and perhaps employed in labour more lowly and painful, gained the Heart of God, and conquered in heaven a kingdom and glory superior to that which surrounds many monarchs who also died adorned with divine grace. Study them as you should, and endeavour to faithfully follow their edifying examples. The reading of the

Acts of the Martyrs, which took place in the Church on their feast days, in the early ages of Christianity, animated the faithful to give their lives for Jesus Christ. All, except the sick and convalescent, heard them standing, to indicate their readiness to follow in the footsteps of those glorious heroes. Read with advantage, then, the lives I offer you. I have taken them from the writings of the Bollandists, Ruinart, Butler, and Baronius, or from the documents they quote; and in writings of this sort each of these authorities is worth a hundred.

And that you may see that the heroes I offer for your consideration copied the model of all the predestined, I will just relate the principal acts of our Divine Saviour, who, for the honour and encouragement of the poor, chose to be born, not among emperors and kings, as He could have been if He only wished, and as His glorious ancestors were, but of lowly artisans, who had to moisten their bread with the sweat of their brow. Follow in His footsteps like His renowned servants, and you will be happy in this life, as far as a poor exile can

be, and you will reign in the other for an endless eternity.

To avoid confusion, I will divide the life of Jesus into twelve chapters, so that you can easily spread the reading of it over the twelve months of the year. I will also distribute the lives of the saints by months, selecting, among the many I might choose from, only four for the four Sundays of each month, adding an appendix to cover all the Sundays of the year. Besides, to keep up the memory of the heroic acts of other men famous in virtue, but not yet canonised, I select twelve Spaniards for the greater part, one for each month. I have taken their history, sometimes from their funeral orations, and sometimes from biographies written by contemporary authors.

Let us begin with the blessing of God and under the protection of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph.

NOTE.

THE editor has taken the liberty of making some slight changes in the author's plan. In the original the history of the Holy Family was given entire in a continuous form : it is now divided into twelve parts, corresponding to the twelve months of the year, to each of which a portion is attached. He has also made a change in the order of succession of the "Lives," for the purpose of making each month contain as nearly as possible the same amount of matter, if published in separate numbers.

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LIGHT FROM THE LOWLY.

Series I.

ST. PETER, TAX-GATHERER AND COOK.

I.

ABOUT the year 530, in the time of the Emperor Justinian, there lived in Africa a man who was hard, cruel, and heartless to the poor, and was justly called, by way of nickname, "Old Stingy." This was Peter the tax-gatherer, who in the course of time was to become the model of Christian collectors and cooks. Admirable is the Lord in his works, but in the conversion of this iron heart He was, in our estimation, superlatively admirable. One wintry day, several beggars were standing in the sunshine to warm their bodies, benumbed with cold, and they began to talk of the houses which gave them alms, praising and blessing their owners, and at the same time cursing those who were hard to the poor. Round the conversation went till it reached the stingy taxgatherer, the hardest of the hard. One said to another: "Is there one of you ever received from the miserable hog a crumb

of bread, or even a good word?" "I tell you what it is," cried one of them; "I bet you what you like, I get an alms from him this very day." The bet was made, and off went the beggar to Old Stingy's house; but he did not find him in, and had to wait till he came home. It happened as a coincidence that at the very time he did arrive the baker came with fresh bread. When Old Stingy heard the beggar asking alms so earnestly and persistently, he got angry, and finding no stone at hand, he seized one of the cakes and flung it at him. The beggar, you may be sure, did not refuse the gift from heaven; but picking up the cake, he ran to his companions, elated with joy at winning the bet.

Scarcely two days had passed after this providential incident, when Peter was laid up with a serious illness, and was on the point of death. In this sickness the Father of mercies placed before his eyes the miserable state of his soul, hanging by a thread between heaven and the abyss of hell. Falling into a deep sleep, he thought he was standing before the divine tribunal to give a strict account of his injustice and sins. A terrifying scene was suddenly presented before him. In the middle of an immense hall a large and finely-balanced beam was hanging, in which all his actions were to be weighed. On the left was a crowd of accusers, black as pitch, their eyes flashing fire, whose very look made him shiver with fear; and on the right were some handsome youths, whose heavenly faces commanded veneration and respect. The former began to fill their scale with the innumerable and grievous faults committed by the unfortunate taxgatherer; whilst the latter, seeing they had no counterpoise to put in theirs, were greatly afflicted, and sadly said: "And has he nothing at all to show in his behalf?" No doubt the poor collector was scared when he clearly saw the end of all his riches, honours, and worldly pleasures; and

was thoroughly alarmed when he thought the sentence was about being pronounced, and he was to be hurled into the flames of hell. "We have not a single thing," said one of the youths, "to put in our scale, unless a cake that he threw at a beggar." Well, they pitched it in eagerly, and with its pressure the two scales were balanced. Then one of the beautiful, angelic youths said to Old Stingy: "Away now and add to this cake, for it has not the weight of charity; otherwise you will fall into the hands of your neighbours there." Then the vision disappeared; and Peter, entering into himself, and believing that it was no mere dream, inasmuch as they charged him with all he committed in his whole life, and with many things he had completely forgotten, resolved to change his way of life, and to lay up good works, which alone are of any avail in that supreme and final judgment. "Ah!" said he, "if a cake thrown in anger was of such use to me, what will be my reward if with a good will I give all I possess to the poor?" And he promised to do so, and kept his promise. As soon as he got well and was free from his sickness, he purified his soul of all its faults in the waters of penance—those very faults his enemies had accused him of—and generously distributed his riches among the needy, never again to be blinded by their false brilliancy. Heroic generosity!—a generosity unknown in our age of boasted philanthropy, but so poor in that disinterested charity which makes us call the ragged and indigent our brethren. So sincerely did our penitent apply himself to the fulfilment of the evangelical counsels, that from the moment he formed his magnanimous resolution, he was never again guilty of any fraud or imposition in the collection of the taxes, and was always indulgent and liberal to the needy, and amiable and charitable to all.

II.

It happened that one morning, when, as usual, he was going to attend to his business, he unexpectedly met with a shipwrecked sailor, who had just escaped from the fury of the waves, and was lying naked on the beach. Peter, with bowels of mercy, assisted the poor man, and taking off his inside coat gave it to him, and then the poor fellow got up and went his way. The sailor was ashamed to wear such a dress, and he soon found means to get rid of it and give it to a shopkeeper to sell. It so happened that our good taxgatherer, when he did his business, had to pass by this shop; and when he saw his coat, was saddened beyond measure. When he got home he would not eat a bit, but shut himself up in a room, and, weeping bitterly, said to himself: "Even the poor of Jesus Christ, miserable wretch that I am, don't think me worth remembering!" The sadness of his thoughts, and his very affliction, caused him to fall into a quiet sleep. Then there appeared to him a Person of celestial beauty, whose countenance shone like the sun; there was a brilliant cross over his head, and among his rich garments could be seen the coat the taxgatherer had given to the sailor. This good Person turned to him, and said: "Peter, what are you crying for?" "Ah! my good Lord," answered he, weeping, "I give generously to the poor of the wealth you have bestowed on me; but when they get anything, they go and sell it, perhaps for the purpose of offending you the more." Then Jesus, opening his garment, said: "Do you know this? Well, I have the honour of wearing what you gave me, and I thank you very much; for I was shivering with cold, and you helped me; I was naked, and you covered me." Then Peter joyfully

awoke, and, praising the poor, enthusiastically exclaimed: "With God's help, since the poor are the representatives of Jesus Christ, I will not die till I have the honour of being one of them!" Our Divine Master long ago said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." St. Bernard calls attention to the fact that Jesus does not say *will be*, but *is* the kingdom of heaven; for those who sincerely renounce all the riches so ambitioned by the world, not only enjoy in this life an ineffable peace, becoming the blessed in heaven, but can lay claim to the kingdom of glory purchased with the earthly goods which they despise for Jesus Christ; and He improves their lot with respect to the children of the world, whom He endows with earthly things, which are here to-day and away to-morrow; but the right to the kingdom of the just He reserves for the poor of spirit, as the first-born sons of God. And they are perfectly at ease, because free from the weight of riches which attach the heart to this miserable exile; and contenting themselves with what is precisely necessary for their journey through life, they hasten on to that blessed land where lies their real treasure. To this poverty of spirit, so praised and beloved by Jesus, are due the illustrious victories and triumphs which the saints gained over the devil; to this nakedness and renunciation of the things of earth they owe their wonderful progress in all kinds of virtue. For, as St. Gregory thoughtfully remarks, the day the devil finds in the soul no affection for things here below, that day he is conquered, for he has nothing to lay hold on. "And so, if you wish," says the saint, "to wrestle manfully with the devil, that he may not throw you to the ground, divest yourself of all worldly things, which are like the clothes of the body which the opponent lays hold of to bring his adversary down."

This resolution was taken by our saint, illuminated by

that mysterious dream, and nothing could prevent him from carrying out his purpose. When Peter brought to mind the torments suffered by those condemned to eternal flames under the yoke of the infernal spirits, and the ineffable glory of the just, who, in the company of the angels, bless and praise the King of heaven for all eternity, all the labours of this world appeared as nothing, so that they freed him from those atrocious pains and gained for him the joys of the blessed. In order, then, to make this great business more and more secure, he made up his mind to divest himself of all, that he might walk without tripping in the path of the divine commandments. So one day he called a slave, whom he employed as clerk, and said to him: "My dear boy, I am going to tell you a secret; and, remember, if you let it out, or do not accept my proposal, I will sell you to the pagans." When he got the slave's consent, he gave him ten pounds weight of gold, and said: "Take me to Jerusalem, and there sell me as a slave to some Christian, and give the price to the poor." The honest clerk refused to do such a thing; but when threatened again with being sold to the pagans, he obeyed. Peter disguised himself, and off went the two to the Holy City, where Jesus had died, being made a slave for love of us.

When they reached the Holy Places, and were passing through the streets of Jerusalem, the slave met a silversmith with whom he was acquainted, and addressed him thus: "Buy from me a first-rate slave I have here with me. You would say he is of noble family." "How can I buy him," replied Zoilus, for that was his name, "when I have not the means to pay for him?" "I will give him to you on credit," said the clerk; "don't let a good thing like this pass you, for you will find God will bless you through his diligence and Christian virtues." They made the bargain at thirty pieces of money, and the silversmith became the master of the ragged slave. The clerk asked

the purchaser to keep the contract secret, and, when he could pay, to give the price to the poor, without defrauding a farthing. When the clerk had faithfully complied with his undertaking, he retired in liberty to Constantinople, wondering at the extraordinary ways by which the Lord was conducting his servant.

Now we have our rich taxgatherer transformed into a poor slave for love of Jesus Christ, and bringing down on his owner the blessings of heaven with his prayers and heroic virtues. If masters only knew how important to them it is to have servants who are good and fervent Christians, not only in the performance of their duties, but in procuring the blessing of the Almighty on the work of their hands, they surely would not look for wretches without the fear of God, who shun their regular toil, and steal all they think they can safely lay their hands on. Peter was put in charge of the kitchen as cook, and he attended table so well, and kept everything so neat and clean, that you would say he had never done anything else in his life—though, of course, he never was employed at such duties before. Nor did he, for all that, neglect the pious exercises of a good Christian, nor did his numerous occupations prevent him from giving some time to prayer. He also practised continual mortification, ever keeping his eyes fixed on the glory of God and the eternal reward he hoped for. Peter's humility, goodness, silence, and diligence brought down showers of benedictions on the family; but his fellow-servants mocked him as a fool and maltreated him; and his master, seeing all this, wanted to set him free, retaining him in his house and treating him as a brother. But Peter would not hear of it, and besought him to allow him to carry that cross, which he appreciated above all the things of earth. If he sometimes felt the burden a little heavy, he was not without heavenly consolations to lighten his load. Many a time, when he felt bowed

down by the weight of tribulation, the Divine Pastor appeared to him, clothed with the coat he had given to the shipwrecked sailor, and, showing him the thirty pieces for which he was sold, would say: "Be not sad, brother Peter, for you see I have here the price of your slavery and all you are suffering for Me. Courage, then, and be constant in your humiliation till you are discovered." Peter was animated by these visits to labour and suffer for Jesus Christ, and left no stone unturned to copy the example of Jesus crucified.

He was contentedly pursuing his ordinary course, when one day some dealers in old silver went to visit the Holy Places, and put up in the house of Peter's master. During dinner, when he was serving at table, the guests began to look sharply at him, and then look again, and at last one said: "How very like Peter the taxgatherer is this butler!" The holy slave hid his face as far as possible, for the guests were not unknown to him; but the conviction growing stronger on them, they said to the silversmith: "Zoilus, if we are not greatly mistaken, you have no common personage in your service." They did not, however, venture to say it for certain, for his duties and mortifications had changed Peter considerably. But in the end one of them, regarding him still more attentively, exclaimed: "It is undoubtedly he! No wonder we missed him so long!"

When the humble servant found he was discovered, he dropped the plates and ran to the door to escape. There was a deaf-mute at the door, and the saint, without thinking, said, with authority: "In the name of God, open the door for me." And the deaf-mute heard and answered: "Yes, sir." And when the door was opened, the servant of God was off on the instant. When the deaf-mute found himself miraculously cured, he ran to the dining-room, and cried: "Master, master!!!"

They were all astonished at hearing him speak; and then he added; "The cook has escaped. . . . He must be a great servant of God, who could give me my speech so suddenly!" Out they ran in search of the fugitive saint; but all in vain, for he had disappeared. Peter retired to Constantinople, to pass the rest of his days there in obscurity. We know not what examples of virtue he gave there; for what we have told is all that is left us by St. John the Almoner, as it is related in his life; but undoubtedly, after filling one scale with good works, and emptying the other by penance, he went to heaven to receive from Jesus the hundred-fold of the fleeting goods he had lent to the poor, and now transformed into lasting and eternal treasures. The Greek Church celebrates his feast on the 20th of January.



BLESSED FACIUS, SILVERSMITH.

I.

AT the end of the twelfth century was born, in Verona, the blessed Facius, celebrated for his skill in the art of silver-working, and more renowned still for his heroic virtues. We know not what his morals were in the agitated period of youth, in which are laid the foundations either of virtues which will adorn a riper age, or

of vices which will accompany gray hairs to the grave. But when we consider that from his earliest days the Lord laid on him the cross of tribulation, making him the butt of envy and the persecutions of implacable enemies, it is not hard to conjecture that from his first years he must have given marked proofs of exemplary and Christian conduct. And, indeed, he had scarcely begun to act a part in the world, when he was attacked bitterly by rivals, who gave him not a moment's rest till they obliged him to abandon his native soil and seek an asylum in the city of Cremona. This occurred about the year 1226.

Soon he made himself known in his new home by his ardent piety and extraordinary love for the poor, whom he venerated as the predilect children of Jesus Christ. Never did he complain of having to earn his bread with the sweat of his brow: on the contrary, he gave God thanks for it, because in his labour he recognised an efficacious means of satisfying for his sins, and discovered a rich vein of celestial treasures, with which to secure for himself and enhance an imperishable crown. The proof of this is the apathy with which he regarded all the goods of earth. Easy it were for him to heap up fleeting riches to sweeten the bitterness of this exile; but such was his disinterestedness and charity, such his piety and zeal for the splendour of the sacred ceremonies, that whatever he economised from his earnings, by cutting down all unnecessary expense, he either divided among the poor or gave to the Church for the greater solemnity of divine worship. Few imitators of such edifying examples are met with nowadays; on the contrary, not a few ignorant people, seduced by men without faith or religion, or addicted to that ghost of religion called Protestantism, condemn all ornament and splendour in the temples and religious functions, as if man were a pure spirit, and could not foment his piety with

that exterior majesty and magnificence which speak to the senses, nor offer to God a tribute of gratitude with the very gold he received from his liberal hands. Those strange people might, perhaps, be pardonable if they applied to their own houses the same rule they apply to the temple of the Most High. But what a difference! Dwelling in sumptuous palaces, in which all kinds of costly adornment vie with the rich furniture and spacious *salons* and magnificent gardens, and all sorts of comfort, to the mockery of the poor, who have not a bite of bread to put in their mouth; they pretend to exile from the house of God every sacred ornament, and even the very images of the saints, whose mute language invites the faithful to practise generosity to the poor and offer consolation to the afflicted. Such was not the conduct of David, who complained to Nathan of living in a house of cedar, while the Ark of the Testament was lodged in a tent covered with rich skins. Nor was it the example bequeathed us by our most celebrated monarchs, and the nobles most distinguished for their Christian virtues. Mercy to the poor has always harmonised with magnificence in divine worship; and when the latter is extinguished in the human heart, the former also suffers loss. Hence these two virtues were ever growing in the heart of Facius, and caused him to be loved by all who knew him. Even the very city, highly edified by the examples of his piety and generosity, considered itself honoured in appointing him its almoner. The saint accepted with pleasure this merciful charge, because it gave loose rein to the charity which inflamed his heart.

Although with the fruits of his labour and the exercise of his office he was promoting the divine honour among his fellow-men, yet this was not enough to satisfy the noble aspirations of the fervent silversmith, who, in order to make his art serve the glory of God more directly,

employed not a few hours of his leisure in making beautiful sacred ornaments for the service of the altar. As works of no slight merit, and as relics of the holy artist, the cathedral could show several productions of the servant of God, among which were a beautiful crown, and cross, and a silver chalice, which were respected by the flames when a terrible fire melted or reduced to ashes all the sacred treasures of that august temple. Thus did our good silversmith pass the flower of his years, beloved by God for his faithful correspondence to the inspirations of divine grace, and admired by men for his Christian amiability and sweetness. But content as he was in these holy occupations, he could not put out of his mind the recollection of his enemies, not from a spirit of vengeance, so opposed to the laws of the Gospel, but from a lively desire, which was bubbling in his heart, to be reconciled to them and press them to his bosom.

II.

Our good Christian, then, was anxious to make friends with those who had persecuted him with such obstinacy and bitterness, and thought that perhaps time had softened their hearts; and so he made up his mind to return to his own country, at that time divided into contending factions. But our virtuous workman was mistaken; for his adversaries, availing themselves of the chance, calumniated him to the Scaligers, who governed the city and were at the head of one of the parties. And so, when he least dreamt of it, the defenceless silversmith was traitorously surprised and cast into jail. The servant of God was not depressed by this unexpected misfortune,

but submitting with Christian resignation, pardoned his enemies from his heart, and acknowledged in it the hand of God, who paternally disposes everything to the advantage of our souls. However, his ardent charity did not allow him to content himself with his own spiritual consolation and improvement; but as a zealous promoter of the divine glory, urged him, besides blessing the Lord for this efficacious means of purifying his soul in the crucible of tribulation, and acquiring merit, to employ all his efforts to help and console his companions in misfortune. Never was heard from his lips a complaint or murmur against those who so unjustly laid that heavy yoke on him; on the contrary, always glad and contented himself, he infused into all the prisoners a Christian spirit to suffer for their sins.

The Omnipotent, who exalts the humble and humbles the proud, glorified his servant by the very means his enemies had employed to bury him in ignominy. At the light of his brilliant examples of patience and resignation, not only a high opinion of his sanctity was formed by all who knew him, but they were even moved to implore his prayers to obtain for them whatever graces they desired. Nor was their confidence vain, for the Lord worked miracles through the mediation of Facius, thus confirming his devout servants in their respect and veneration for the fervent Silversmith. Two cases attracted special attention: one in which he freed a poor woman from the possession of the devil, from which she had suffered eighteen years; and the other in which he cured a child on the point of death, that for eight days had refused its mother's milk and all kinds of food.

When the Father of mercy was satisfied with the patience of the invincible captive, it pleased Him to put an end to his imprisonment. It happened that the inhabitants of Cremona went to assist those of Verona in

the war they were waging against the people of Mantua, and returning victorious, they interceded for the innocent almoner, and obtained for him his liberty. Thus does the Lord take the part of his own, at the time and in the manner most conducive to the good of their souls.

Our charitable Facius started again for Cremona, where he could, without hindrance or rivalry, dedicate himself to the works which his ardent zeal for the glory of God and the good of his beloved poor might suggest. It is needless to say that once settled down in his old home, he renewed his fervour and his former pious works. Wonderful was his union with God in the midst of the labours of Martha. Ever and in all places, beyond the frequent aspirations he addressed to God, the immense ocean of goodness, he was seen recollected and, as it were, buried in the divine presence. And not content with his own spiritual improvement, which he drew from prayer, to which he dedicated all the time left him by his occupation, and his assiduous attendance at the services of the Church, at which he assisted with great fervour and recollection, he exhorted all to do likewise, and to frequently eat of the Bread of the strong, the source of true peace and solid happiness. But his piety was most marked in rendering to God a continuous tribute of thanksgiving. Burning in the flame of divine love, he frequently invited all he met to give God glory and thanks, repeating with holy enthusiasm: "Praise God! Praise my God!"

III.

The royal Prophet says: "O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise Him, all ye people. For his mercy is confirmed upon us: and the truth of the Lord remaineth for ever." Such is the hymn which often burst from that bosom perfected according to the Divine Heart; and such also the song which all Christians sing who appreciate their soul at its just value. As man was created to glorify God, he can sing no hymn more agreeable to the Author of his days. Hence our good silversmith, not satisfied with blessing the Almighty for the incessant favours received from His hand, invited all to help him to glorify God, who is worthy of all love and praise. How few there are who imitate such laudable conduct! When urged by necessity, they raise their voices, like the ten lepers of the Gospel, and cry out: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us;" but as soon as they are free from the scourge which threatened them, far from imitating the grateful Samaritan, who glorified his benefactor, they forget the graces received, like unclean animals which never regard the hand that gives them their daily food. "Ever give thanks," says the Apostle, "to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, praising and blessing the Lord in your prayers for all things."

This was our saint's rule of conduct; but let no one imagine that he thereby neglected his duties. Urged on by charity, he applied himself to his work with edifying interest, that he might have the more to give to the poor. His bowels of mercy allowed him not rest or delay whenever he could console anyone afflicted, but even impelled him to pass a considerable part of Sunday,

intended for the repose of the limbs wearied by work, in visiting the sick and those in prison, clothing the naked, giving food to the hungry, animating the sad, teaching the ignorant, and putting those who went astray on the path of eternal salvation. And whence came to him that invincible perseverance in treading the road of the saints? It was from prayer and the frequenting of the sacraments he gained courage to undertake new enterprises for the glory of God. Ever zealous for the splendour of divine worship, soon after he regained his liberty, about the year 1233, he built with his own labour and alms a charming oratory, in which he used to meet some pious companions to promote their mutual advancement in Christian virtues. There he formed his heroic plans of beneficence; and fearing lest his death might also put an end to the charitable aspirations of his friends, with the object of rendering them perpetual, he invited them to form an association which should unite the exercises of religion there practised with the relief of the poor. This was carried out, and so by his means was formed the congregation known as "The Society of the Holy Ghost."

IV.

At that time it was quite the custom to make pilgrimages to the most celebrated shrines of Christendom, and particularly to the tombs of the Apostles; and their origin goes back to the first ages of the Church, who always blessed them as a means of promoting piety. But do not imagine that such excursions were made

from a spirit of vanity, idleness, or pastime, as many make them at the present day, but with the intention of enlivening faith at sight of the ashes of those who gave their lives in defence of the Catholic doctrine, and of mortifying themselves and doing penance, by applying, in satisfaction for their sins, the serious privations which such long journeys then entailed. The vicars of Jesus Christ generously opened the inexhaustible treasures of the Church, and granted many graces and indulgences to the devout pilgrims, thus promoting, as far as they could, these pious journeys, which often served as a bond of union between one Catholic nation and another.

Facius would not be deprived of that means of sanctification, which produced such salutary effects in well-disposed souls. He consequently performed several pilgrimages, now to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and now to the shrine of our glorious patron, St. James of Compostela, always returning to Cremona full of new fervour and well-earned deserts. He was once called to visit a sick nobleman, of whose recovery the doctors had despaired; and notwithstanding that he found him on the point of death, fortified with all the sacraments, our devout silversmith encouraged him to have confidence in God, and promised him his health if he made a vow to visit the tomb of St. James. The sick man agreed, and got well almost immediately, to the great joy and wonder of the whole family. The servant of God was asked to accompany the pilgrim on the journey, and he willingly consented to help him to fulfil his vow; and after escaping many dangers by sea and land, brought him back safe and sound to his home at last. Thus did Facius sanctify his soul, by availing himself of every means that God afforded him. But what he employed most care and attention in was the sanctification of his ordinary work. At the stroke of his hammer and the grating of his file he intoned hymns

to the King of heaven, never losing any occasion of increasing in virtue or doing good to his neighbour. He was the very model of a Christian workman.

V.

He never took part in dangerous games or jests, nor frequented places of dissipation, nor permitted another's faults to be criticised in his presence, nor indecent subjects to be mentioned, nor anything to be done unworthy of those who efficaciously desire their eternal salvation. His conversation always turned either on holy things, that might help to enliven the spirit of piety, or on indifferent subjects, which might raise his mind from the cares of his labour, and animate him to follow with more courage the path of virtue. Would that every parish had inhabitants so edifying! Even the very religious had to learn from a poor workman sanctified in the midst of the dangers of the world; for the Bishop of Cremona, moved by his extraordinary proofs of sanctity, and by the wonderful prodigies with which the Lord glorified the illustrious silversmith, ordered him to visit in his name the convents of the diocese. But for a short time could Facius discharge the duties of this high mission, for he had scarcely commenced when he was called by the Lord to receive the reward of his labours. His death, like his life, was that of a saint.

Finding himself attacked by fever, he fortified his soul with the sacraments, to be able to sustain the last combat with the capital enemy; and aware of his approaching end, like an unconquered champion of the faith, he placidly gave up his soul, to Him who had

created it, on the 18th January, 1272. He left the little he had to the sick in the Hospital of the Holy Ghost, for whom he had laboured so much. Soon the news spread through the city that the saint was dead. The whole town, bewailing the death of so charitable a man, attended his funeral as a mark of their respect and appreciation, and so did all the priests of the city. Many miracles were wrought by our Lord at the grave of the humble silversmith. Thus do those triumph after death who know how in life to conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil, and unhesitatingly follow the path of sanctity.



ST. NICEPHORUS, ARTISAN.

I.

THOUGH we know not what the profession of this great saint was, yet we are aware, from what is related in the acts of his martyrdom, that he was a man of the common people, perhaps without learning, and consequently had to gain his bread by his industry and labour. We did not like to omit his life, for the brilliant proof it affords us of how much the Lord is pleased by the pardon of injuries. The Christian should have no enemies but the world, the flesh, and the devil, and no bitterness for anyone, except in doing violence to himself. Regenerated by charity, he should be charitable to all;

he should breathe nothing but charity even for those who outrage and persecute him. Far be it from us to entertain hatred and vengeance, which only suit despicable and mean hearts, but are totally unworthy of one who by grace was raised to the dignity of Son of God.

Our saint lived in Antioch, in Syria, and led a life of solid Christian virtue. He was aided in this both by meditation on the divine commandments and eternal truths, and the intimate friendship and frequent communication he had with Sapphirus, an edifying and zealous priest. They loved each other like brothers, and mutually assisted each other with tender solicitude and Christian emulation. But the enemy, who never sleeps, envious of the glory which resulted to God from so virtuous a friendship, did not rest till he sowed the seeds of discord between them. Then the bonds of friendship were broken, and hatred succeeded charity to such a degree, that when they saw each other on the street they turned their heads that they might not meet face to face. This conduct was pursued for a long time by these former models of good friends.

At last, Nicephorus, feeling the remorse and restlessness of conscience, which burn the rancorous heart like living fire, and which had come to him to exile the calmness, peace, and tranquillity produced in the soul by charity and justice, entering into himself, acknowledged the enormity of his fault, and resolved to try every means to be reconciled to his enemy. He sent to him mutual friends to be his advocates and obtain pardon for him, assuring the other of the sincerity of his repentance, and his resolve to give him every sort of satisfaction; but all in vain, for the bad priest would not even hear his enemy spoken of. In this repulse many would have more than sufficient pretext, not only to become hardened in their sin, but even to call into doubt the holy maxims of their faith, so badly observed

by some of its ministers. But our Artisan knew that priests, mortal men as they are like others, may sin and be condemned after having to render to God a double account of their conduct. And not caring, like a prudent man, to expose his eternal salvation because the other was obstinate in his perdition, he tried again, and sought new intercessors to treat with Sapricius. But he was still unsuccessful, and after receiving a second and third affront, he resolved to go to him in person. Our good workman went and threw himself at the feet of the person offended, and besought him for the love of Jesus Christ to pardon him. But this heroic act of humility had no better effect than the intervention of his friends. He who should be the minister of mercy was hardened, and he not only closed his ears to all cries for reconciliation and pardon, but even became deaf to the voice of God, loudly repeating in his heart: "Forgive, and you shall be forgiven."

In the meantime the persecution of the Christians, which appeared to have calmed down, was terribly renewed under the government of Galienus and Valerian. The waves of this tempest, excited about the year 260 of the Christian era, reached Antioch. As Sapricius was one of the Christians who figured most in that city, so was he also one of the first to fall into the hands of the persecutors. When taken prisoner before the Governor, he was asked his name. "I am called Sapricius," he answered. "And what is your profession?" asked the governor. "I am a Christian," replied the prisoner. "Are you an ecclesiastic?" "Though unworthy," said Sapricius, "I am a priest of Jesus Christ. We Christians adore Jesus, the only true God, as the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, and we abominate your gods, because they are the representatives of the devil who holds you captive." The Governor was irritated by this noble answer, and ordered Sapricius to be tormented. The

confessor of the faith was not scared at this, but suffered the torture with invincible constancy, saying to the judge, in the midst of his torments: "You have my body in your power, torment it as you like; but you cannot touch my soul, which is subject only to Jesus Christ, who alone can destroy the body, and cast body and soul into unquenchable fire." When the tyrant saw that all his machines could not draw from Sapricius an abjuration of faith, and that neither promises nor threats had any effect on a heart which regarded it as a glory to suffer for Jesus, he passed the following sentence of death on him: "That Sapricius, a Christian priest, who is obstinate in his mad religion, and ridiculously believes he will rise one day, be handed over to the executioner, who will cut off his head in punishment of his contempt for the edict of the emperors." The minister of the Crucified heard the sentence with calmness and even with joy, desiring to give his life for the glory of Him who gave his for love of us on the shameful wood of the cross.

II.

He was preparing to go to the place of execution, with the hope of soon wearing the martyr's crown, when Nicephorus, having heard of the glorious confession of the priest, ran to him and threw himself at his feet, exclaiming: "Martyr of Jesus Christ, pardon the fault I committed against thee." Even in these critical circumstances he repulsed the penitent offender, nor did he who was going to die for Him whose first words from the pulpit of the cross were words of pardon for his very executioners, deign to open his lips to him. The

afflicted Nicephorus arose, but did not despair of gaining his object. He ran to another street, through which the martyr must pass, and making his way through the crowd, he again flung himself at his feet, and weeping said: "For Jesus Christ's sake, do not condemn me to despair; pardon the fault I committed more from frailty than malice; I beseech you by the glorious confession you have made of our Divine Redeemer." But the heart of Sapricius was hardened more and more, the poor wretch forgetting that our Lord rejects the sacrifice of him who entertains the spirit of vengeance in his heart; he did not see that in punishment of his hardness the palm might escape from his hand, and the crown fall from his head. He walked on, without deigning to turn a compassionate glance on Nicephorus, who followed him in tears, imploring his pardon. The soldiers grew tired of our Artisan, and wondering at his persistence, cried out to him: "What madness is this? The man is going to die, and yet there you are asking his pardon!" Even when they arrived at the place of execution, Nicephorus returned to the charge, and redoubled his entreaties and his tears in request of pardon; but Sapricius remained obstinate in his hard-heartedness and vengeance.

III.

Soon, however, he experienced the chastisement of heaven. The executioner had the sword raised, and was about to give the blow, when Sapricius detained him, and asked: "Why are you going to cut off my head?" "For your disobedience to the emperor's orders, and for refusing to offer incense to our gods."

“Hold a moment,” said the unfortunate man, “bring me fire and incense, and I will sacrifice to your idols. Don’t kill me.” Nicephorus, who was present, was filled with bitter sadness on hearing this, and cried out to him: “For God’s sake, father, what are you doing? Do you thus deny Jesus Christ? For a short span of life do you thus purchase eternal death?” But these feeling words made no impression on the heart of Sapricius, who was now the slave of Satan. Then Nicephorus, anxious to make reparation to the glory of Jesus, injured by the apostasy of an unworthy priest, and bitterly bewailing so terrible a fall, called out to the executioners: “I am a Christian; I adore as my God, Jesus Christ, to whom this unfortunate man has become a renegade. Here I am, ready to suffer a thousand deaths, sooner than renounce my Jesus and adore your gods, the representatives of your vices, the images of the devil; or offer them sacrifice, whose very smoke contaminates the air. This unexpected exclamation embittered the joy and contentment the idolaters felt at the fall of the priest. One of the soldiers ran to tell the governor what had happened: “Sir,” said he, “the obstinacy of Sapricius has broken down, and he promises to sacrifice to the gods; but another man has come forward, who proclaims himself a Christian, and says he will never deny his God, nor sacrifice to our divinities, nor in this obey the orders of our august emperor.”

When the governor heard this report, he pronounced sentence against Nicephorus, saying: “If this man refuses to offer incense to the gods, let him be decapitated in place of Sapricius.” The new athlete was invincible, and constant in confessing Jesus, and, bending his neck to receive the fatal blow, his head rolled on the ground. The angels came down to receive that holy soul, and crown it with the diadem of martyrdom, and place on it the triple aureola of faith, humility, and

charity, of which Sapricius was unworthy, through his hardness of heart, and his refusal to pardon injuries. Thus were the crowns transferred. What a terrible lesson for those who harbour in their souls sentiments of hatred and vengeance against their brethren! "I want mercy and not sacrifice," said the Lord; and never will He receive into his friendship and grace him who obstinately refuses to pardon his enemies, even though he should shed all the blood in his body for religion; for it is not the torments that make martyrs, but charity. The feast of this illustrious Artisan is celebrated in the Greek as well as in the Latin Church, on the 9th of February.

BLESSED GENTIL, SHOEMAKER'S WIFE.

I.

WHILST Charles V., with more than ordinary pomp, was being crowned in Bologna by Clement VII., there was celebrated in heaven the coronation of a poor woman, in reward of her heroic virtues, which rendered her the model of modest virgins, patient wives, and fervent widows. She was called Gentil, and was the daughter of Thomas Justo, a silversmith of Verona. Gentil was born in Ravenna, of which city her mother was also a native, and had the fortune to meet in her youth with a holy virgin, through whose example and Christian

conversation she took a great interest in works of piety, and every act of virtue. In imitation of her, she avoided those places and diversions in which the innocence of incautious youth usually perishes, for death is met with where happiness was sought. It is wonderful what the counsels of a good friend can do in a well-disposed mind. As a bad companion generally sticks the pitch of his vices to those who have the misfortune to be familiar with him, so, on the other hand, intercourse with the virtuous infuses into the soul a love of virtue, and a contempt and horror of whatever can stain the purity of the soul. There are few who may not attribute their improvement or their ruin to a good or bad friend.

By the side of so good a companion, it is wonderful how Gentil advanced on the way of perfection. She was a most modest and laborious virgin; and with equal pleasure put her hand to the brush or the wheel, as she did to the rosary beads and the discipline; for in one and the other she only sought to please God, the sole centre of her love. She was very young when her parents thought of marrying her, thinking more of the worldly condition of the husband than his qualities as a Christian. The parents who place the happiness of their daughters' marriage in the good matches they procure for them, and in the splendid dresses with which they blind and fill them with pride, generally meet with a great mistake in it; for, with their mind fixed on this, which is of no importance, they forget the interior gifts of the soul, which is the principal thing, and should be the motive of all marriages, if they are to be firm, blessed, and happy. For, when avarice and lust, either by regarding alone riches or beauty, are the motives of a marriage, that marriage is seldom fortunate. A man has no reason to wonder that, if he marry for money or beauty, which to-morrow may cease to exist, the love and benevolence which rest on such slight foundations

should also disappear with them. Daily experience tells us that, in marriages in which God does not intervene, but passion; and virtue, and similarity of disposition do not join the spouses' hands, but the greed of riches, or disordered inclinations; the husband and wife soon disagree, and the wine of the wedding is converted into vinegar, the love into hate, and what should be a sweet and agreeable companionship becomes a sad and painful captivity. Thus did it happen to our invincible heroine, who was married in her fresh young years to James Planella, a shoemaker, and met with nothing in her wedded life but briers and thorns. She had two sons, one of whom died at seven years of age; and the other, who was miraculously cured of a serious illness, afterwards became a priest.

II.

Soon the honey^a of her marriage, contracted more to please her parents than from her own choice, melted away; for the servant of God's holy method of life excited the anger and displeasure of her husband to such a degree that it not only brought her an abundant harvest of injurious charges, calumnies, and taunts, but also cruel and barbarous treatment. Jealousy and suspicion are bad counsellors. Everything the poor woman did was ill-done in the eyes of Planella, everything was an insult to him, everything a proof of her little or no affection for him. The poor thing was extremely beautiful, and the wretched man believed that she disliked him, and gave her guilty love to others. There was nothing wanting to convert a family which, as far as Gentil was concerned, might have been the

reflection of the peace of paradise, into a miserable and prolonged hell on earth. All was shouts, charges, and hard names for the innocent spouse; and, in his fury, he even sometimes raised his hand to his defenceless victim. But she contented herself with simply and meekly explaining the truth, and never returned evil for evil, nor gave an answer to his insults. On the contrary, she bore her heavy cross, not only with resignation to the divine will, but with ineffable peace, as a favour sent her by the Father of mercies. What she did feel, indeed, and what wounded her very heart, was the offence to God, and the scandal which the blinded husband gave his tender children. Edifying, certainly, were the patience and charity of the holy wife, but still more edifying was the silence with which she bore it all. When man is in tribulation, he seeks a friend in whom to confide his sufferings, and breaks into complaints to alleviate his pain; but never did a complaint pass the lips of Gentil, never did her neighbours learn from her what she was suffering in silence. Her heroic patience went even further: though her prayers had such weight with God, she never asked Him to free her from that continual martyrdom. How many heart-burnings would many wives escape if they only imitated this example of silence and abnegation! Gentil had no confidants in her troubles but God and her confessor. On a certain occasion, her intimate friend, Margaret, knowing by divine revelation the trials of the martyred wife, asked her in all charity: "How are you getting on, my child?" And Gentil, with a smile on her lips, and her heart full of joy, answered: "Right well, Margaret; I could not ask to be better. The Lord is better to me than I deserve." Such was the consolation which the testimony of a good conscience gave her,—a consolation which the Lord abundantly poured out on her soul in the midst of her sufferings. "Come, come,"

replied the other, "remember, a little bird tells me your trials. But never mind, bear with your cross, and your reward shall be great."

Gentil, in spite of her husband's perverseness, treated him with all the meekness which Jesus Christ taught us. She was always attentive and obedient to all his commands, ever docile and submissive to his wishes. She answered his wicked expressions with manifestations of affection and love, his sourness and ill-treatment with extreme sweetness, his ingratitude and renewed injuries with a particular care in serving and pleasing him. But this holy endeavour, far from contributing to soften that adamant heart, only embittered it the more and roused it against his loving consort. Such is the development of an unsubdued passion. The wretch, not satisfied with outraging her with word and deed, obliged her to pass the night, from daylight to daylight, wetting shoes and regulating the clothes of the house. But Gentil thought nothing of it; for the solitude and silence afforded her an opportunity of meditating on the vanity of all the goods and pleasures of the world, and of holding, during her work, tender conversations with God and the Blessed Virgin; from which she derived new strength to carry her cross, under whose weight many women without her solid virtue would have succumbed. And she did not, for all that, allow this to exempt her from assiduously applying herself during the day to her domestic tasks, taking special care to have everything well arranged, clean, and polished, as she was anxious to give her husband no occasion to get out of temper.

But the capital enemy of our souls knows how to suggest dangers in the very thing that should edify us; and the unhappy husband allowed himself to be caught in his nets. As his soul knew neither peace nor repose, he declared bitter war against his loving spouse. With

a spirit of vengeance, fed by hatred of many years standing, he cruelly and feloniously accused her as a witch and a corrupter of morals before the ecclesiastical authority, with the hope of seeing her burned alive. The Vicar-General and other ecclesiastical and secular authorities came at once to investigate the charges brought against her by her own husband; but they were astonished when, instead of the infamous woman her husband had painted her, they found a matron clearly innocent, and deserving of all praise for her virtues and integrity of life. The blind and heartless husband was so annoyed at this that he abandoned poor Gentil, and emigrated to Padua, leaving her buried in misery.

III.

But the Lord, who is the Father of the deserted, and looks in a particular manner after those who throw themselves into the arms of His providence, did not abandon her. Gentil was overjoyed at her new lot, and only bewailed the perdition of her husband. So she prayed continually to the Lord to touch that heart, so hardened in sin, and was resolved not to desist from her demand till she obtained this grace from the Omnipotent. Beyond that she thought nothing of her wayward husband, and employed herself exclusively in pleasing God, giving a Christian education to her son Leo, and providing by her labour the necessaries of this miserable life. Many a time, however, she found herself without a bit of bread to give to her child; but the Lord, who clothes in beauty the flowers of the field, and supplies food to the birds of the air, provided for this

beloved family by extraordinary means. Often, when she found herself in these straits, she discovered in the house more than she required, without knowing who brought it, or whence it came. Thus does the Lord succour those who serve Him as they should.

Now that Gentil was free from the vexations caused by her husband, the Lord Himself undertook to try her patience, as of old He did that of his friend Jôb. It is impossible to tell the number and the intensity of the illnesses which attacked this elect of God—enough that they did not leave her a sound organ or a member free from pain. And yet she was always content and happy; and from her lips came nothing but benedictions and thanks to the Almighty, because in these sufferings He enriched her with a means of paying for her sins, as she expressed it. One of her most painful attacks lasted fourteen years; and she who, with her prayers and her very touch, had freed others from sickness, could not bring herself to ask God for the health of her own body. To suffer was to her a pleasure preferable to all the delights with which the world deceives its slaves.

This indomitable virtue, this saintly patience, Gentil derived, in a great measure, from that inexhaustible fountain of divine grace, the frequenting of the sacraments. As soon as she had committed—not mortal sins, for they would not leave her a moment's peace—but some action or omission not in strict conformity with the divine will, she would run at the earliest opportunity to the feet of her confessor, to bewail with bitter tears her venial fault, often incurred without advertence. Besides this she confessed every week her past imperfections and faults, ever weeping over them. When thus purified in the sacred fountain, she approached the altar with great recollection, modesty, and devotion, to receive the Bread of Angels; burning so in the ardent flame of

the love of God, that, though naturally pale and sickly-looking, she often became red as a rose, shining like fire, through the love which inflamed her heart.

Her prayers were continual. Beyond the long time she employed in treating with God about the affairs of her soul, often regaled with celestial consolation, she found now in her labour, now in the street, now when alone, now when in company, motives for raising her heart to God, and making frequent acts of faith, hope, charity, humility, and all the other virtues. She was extremely temperate in eating, fasted often, and punished with severe disciplines that body already afflicted with so many infirmities. She dressed with edifying simplicity, without attracting attention by affected tidiness or cleanliness; and she was so modest, that she flew from everything that could stain her soul in the slightest degree. And this without show or feminine vanity; for, except closing her ears to idle talk, she avoided with great diligence all exterior actions which might procure for her any estimation. With her Christian conversation she sweetly and insensibly corrected those with whom she had dealings, reducing hardened sinners to penance, undoing inveterate enmities, and inducing all to frequent the sacraments, as the only means of freeing themselves with certainty from the nets of their mortal enemy. Among others, what happened to Jerome Maluselli, who afterwards wrote the life of our saint, is worthy of special mention.

IV.

When he was yet very young, and of somewhat relaxed morals, he mocked at everything he heard told of the virtues of the servant of God. However, he was

induced, by the entreaties of his sister, to go to visit Gentil, not without a certain show of contempt and incredulity, for it was four years since he was at confession. — As soon as he entered the house he smelt a certain inexplicable fragrance; and, having heard her warnings and counsels, enlightened by divine grace, he felt his heart changed, and he determined to lead a solidly Christian life. The issue proved the efficacy of his resolutions; for, detesting his past sins, and regenerating his soul with a good confession, he began to practise Christian mortification and piety. And this young man was not the only one who, through Gentil's edifying conversations, made a complete change of life; for many, seeing their secret thoughts discovered by the humble woman, and wondering at the wise counsels and reflexions which flowed from her lips, improved their morals, and, through her prayers and maxims, conceived a love for chastity, and obtained strength to overcome the enticements of the flesh. To this many bore witness on oath, when, by order of Paul III., informations were taken about the life of the blessed servant of God.

This saintly woman was so charitable to the poor, that she yearned for them like a loving mother. For succouring a poor deserted female she was driven out of the city, as if she had the contagion of the plague, which was devastating the country. Providence of the Lord! God availed of this misfortune to make his elect spouse the angel of peace and the balsam of life to the proscribed sufferers. Obligated as she was to live with those afflicted by the plague, she unceasingly attended them, and poured the oil of consolation on their sorrowful hearts, and, above all, prepared their souls for the voyage to eternity. In the famine which succeeded that calamity, although Gentil might be reckoned amongst the indigent, she distributed her little all among the poor; and, having at last nothing to give, she wept

like a tender mother who sees around her her children dying of hunger, without having a mouthful of bread to reach them. She was accustomed to visit the sick, with great solicitude and charity; and, as many were miraculously cured by her prayers, lest she might acquire any character for holiness, she desisted from her intercession till, having consulted her spiritual director, she obtained permission to prosecute her works of mercy. She had the greatest pleasure in the world in doing good to her fellow-beings; but, as she was ever a child of obedience, she gave up her charitable visits the moment he whom God had given her as the director of her soul told her to do so. She was always submissive to his counsels, and abhorred all exterior acts which might gain her the estimation of men. But, if she was on all occasions solicitous for the temporal welfare of her neighbours, she was much more so for their spiritual welfare, and particularly in praying for those who, forgetful of their last end, were running headlong to their eternal and irreparable ruin. However, her heart gave a preference to those from whose good life the greater glory of God should result, and to those from whom she had received any harm or injury.

And so she prayed every day for the unfortunate husband, who so infamously had abandoned herself and her poor child in misery. Sooner or later the fruit of humble prayer is gathered. After many years' silence, and when he might have expected they had completely forgotten him, James came back to live again with his wife. She received him with open arms, as if in her whole life she had got from him nothing but unequivocal proofs of tenderness and love. But now, like a prodigal husband, taught by the lessons which the devil gives his followers, fully convinced that all the felicity which the world promises is no more than smoke which is dissipated by a breath, wondering no less at the innocence

and solid virtue of Gentil than at the special providence with which the Lord had watched over her, he deeply bewailed his errors and changed his life, to the unspeakable consolation of his soul and the whole family. And so he lived the rest of his life like a good Christian, tasting the sweets of the heart of the just, till he died, penitent for his past disorders, and attended by Jerome Maluselli, who had become a priest. Our widow was supremely consoled, not by the death of her husband, who, even when treating her like a cruel executioner, never received from her the slightest complaint, but because poor James had ended his days in a holy manner, according to the desires of her heart, and she had now in this world no one to content but her sweet Jesus, the beloved Spouse of her soul. "The woman who is married," says the apostle, "has a care for the things of the world, and how she may please her husband." Free, now, from this yolk, sweet, indeed, to those who try to please God in all things, Gentil thought of nothing but the things of the Lord, and how to be holy in body and soul, according to the advice of St. Paul, who wrote thus to Timothy, v. 3.: "Honour widows that are widows indeed. But, if any widow have children or grandchildren, let her learn first to govern her own house, and to make a return of duty to her parents; for this is acceptable before God. But she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, let her trust in God, and continue in supplications and prayers night and day. For she that liveth in pleasures is dead while she is living." Imbued with these holy maxims, our widow dedicated herself to perfecting the education of her son Leo, who was pursuing an ecclesiastical course of studies, and to edify with her prayers and example all those with whom she lived.

V.

To the pious family, which, after the death of Planella, was composed of the widow, her son Leo, and a female relative, was now added that zealous minister of Jesus Christ, Jerome Maluselli. Their house resembled that of the widow Judith, who, according to the testimony of the Scripture, retired with her servants to the highest room in the house, and "wearing hair-cloth upon her loins, fasted all the days of her life, except the sabbaths, and new moons, and the feasts of the house of Israel." So the dwelling of Gentil was converted into a little convent, in which all vied in serving their good Jesus. But our pious widow always led the van, and our Lord bestowed on her many crosses and consolations. And of the latter, the least was not that which she experienced when she saw her son ordained a priest, and received Holy Communion from his hands. But what our Lord rewarded her continual mortification most in was her spirit of prayer and her intimate relations with Jesus Christ. Few, indeed, were the hours of the day in which Gentil was not absorbed in contemplation of the divine mysteries, and no intercourse with her own or strangers could interfere with this holy occupation. The following fact is a proof of this:—

When the Constable of Bourbon was overrunning the Romagna, on his way to the capital of the Christian world, Gentil, who was in her room talking to some persons, suddenly became alarmed, and grew quite pale. When asked the cause of the sudden change, she said she saw Rome fearfully and barbarously sacked. And indeed on the 6th of May, 1527, Bourbon was before the walls of the Eternal City, at the head of an army composed of immoral Catholics and blind Protestants, the latter thirsting for the destruction of Catholicity,

the former greedy for vengeance, and all anxious for the rich booty promised them. The assault was made, and these nominal Christians proved themselves more sanguinary than the barbarous soldiers of Attila. They ran through the streets, drunk with wine and lust, one covered with a mitre, another dressed in a cardinal's habit, another wearing a sacred stole over his uniform. The booty was collected in the temples, whose altars were converted into tables for orgies, and into couches for execrable liberties. What a fearful desolation! It would draw tears of sorrow to see venerable cardinals marched by on asses by a dissolute soldiery, the asylums of virginity abandoned to violation and pillage, wives outraged in presence of their husbands, daughters dishonoured before their mothers' eyes; in a word, abomination triumphant in the midst of the Holy City! Great, indeed, must have been the crimes for which the Lord sent a scourge so terrible. It was these crimes rather than the chastisements of God, who after all is our Father, that transpierced the heart of our venerable widow; but the cup of divine wrath was full, and the Omnipotent wished to show the world what hearts without faith or the fear of God can do. The Pope was made captive, and the Christian world went into mourning; and our own Spain, which was then very religious, offered up to God penitential prayers for the release of his vicar.

One year after this lamentable event Gentil lost her beloved son. The pious widow bore this terrible affliction with strict conformity to the will of God, content that the Lord had rescued him from the tempestuous sea of the world, and brought him to the harbour of salvation; and soon after the disconsolate mother ended her mortal career. Two years after she became childless she died the happy death of the just. As a stone rolled from the top of a mountain gains in pace

as it approaches the valley, so, in our venerable matron, according as her illness was increasing, and the end of her life nearing, the lively and ardent desire of being united to Jesus, the centre of our eternal happiness, was growing stronger and stronger. At last, while imploring the divine mercy, her soul went to receive the crown due to her ineffable deserts. She ended her mortal pilgrimage at the age of 59, on the 28th day of January, 1530. She left her house to Jerome Maluselli, that he might build a temple to the Omnipotent on its site; and this the zealous priest, trusting in Divine Providence, and the protection of his blessed friend, undertook to do, and carried it to a successful issue with the alms which flowed in on him from all quarters.



VENERABLE JOHN FRANCIS OF PALMA, MATMAKER.

I.

HE was the son of poor but fervent Catholic parents; and he received in his childhood a solid, Christian education. He was scarcely seven years of age when he had to bend his infantile shoulders to work, and was apprenticed to a matmaker. He humbly and obediently accepted gladly the burden imposed on him at so early

an age, endeavouring to do correctly all that he was ordered. When engaged in platting or hemming bass, he did not forget the devout practices he had learned from his parents; on the contrary, assisted by celestial lights, he took the lead, though only a child, of many adults in perfection, and the knowledge of divine mysteries. At eight years of age, enamoured of the angelical virtue, whether from the example of some saints he had heard of, or by special inspiration of the Blessed Virgin, to whom he was very devout, he made a vow of perpetual chastity—a vow which he kept so perfectly during his life that he did not even dream of breaking it in the most venial way. Hence it is that from his tenderest years his life was a perfect model for holy workmen. To his attention to his business, which was great, whether to meet the necessities of his poor parents, or to have something to give to the poor of Jesus Christ, he united a tender piety, a holy anxiety to hear Mass with due composure and recollection, to pay with burning affection a visit to Jesus in the Holy Sacrament, to say the Rosary with attention and devotion, and to perform other pious practices befitting those who wish to foster the divine love in their souls. Modest, obedient, and charitable, he was respected by poor and rich. No one dared to stain another's character in his presence; and if some incautious person did utter a criticism or bad word, he soon received a charitable advice. He felt very much offences against God; and he did all that was in his power either to prevent them or to repair them. Pondering in his own mind over the dangers, obstacles, and risks of every sort, which the world throws in the path of the servants of God, and maturely reflecting how much poor clothing aids a fervent heart, that he might live with greater regularity, and more easily trample on human respect, he put on the habit of the Third Order of St. Francis, wearing

from that out nothing but frieze, and always going bare-footed and bare-legged. Animated by the spirit which the Seraphic Father desired in his children, he not only adjusted his conduct to the rules of the Order, but was remarkable among the most observant for his exactness and modesty. He was before all, especially in his love for poverty, piety, and mercy. He was never ashamed of his humble birth; and though he could, by his attention to business, and his economy in what he ate and wore, have procured for himself a position of ease, his liberality to the poor was so great that he could never escape from his humble condition. In exchange he received from his beloved Jesus extraordinary graces. Among other proofs of the providence with which He watched over the life of His servant was this: When he was one day almost fainting from his continual abstinence, the Saviour Himself came and brought him food. John Francis was much more grateful for this favour than were the disciples miraculously fed in the desert, and the thought of it excited in his soul sentiments of humility and ardent love. Nothing could cool the burning fire within his heart; and no matter what work his hands were engaged on he tried to keep it alive with holy considerations and loving affections.

II.

Such was the edification he gave by his fervour, industry, and modesty, that his Eminence Cardinal Moscoso, Bishop of Jaen, moved by the fame of his virtues, wished to afford him a proof of his veneration and affection by giving him the direction of a dilapidated hospital. He could have offered him nothing

more suited to his charitable inclinations. So, without forgetting his mats, he undertook the physical and moral restoration of that asylum of the suffering with such interest and zeal that in a short time it was in a better condition, with regard to the accommodation of the sick, than it was in the prosperous years of its foundation. The prelate was so pleased with the activity and prudence of our Matmaker that he made him one of his *famuli*, regarding him as a precious relic, and employing him in distributing alms to the poor and teaching catechism to the children. John Francis performed all gracefully and successfully, meriting by his virtues and lights from heaven not only the estimation of his own and strangers, of rich and poor, but the favours of his Divine Master for imprinting his consoling doctrine on the minds of the rude. In circumstances which appeared to render the thing impossible, he had foretold that he should be a priest, confessor, and director of nuns. And the thing which previously appeared impossible, was desired by many, who would formerly have laughed at the idea, but now held the man of God in high esteem. Among them was the above-mentioned bishop, and for this purpose he ordered him to study Latin and wear shoes, which he had not worn since he enlisted in the Third Order. Through obedience, then, he went through a course of studies in the schools of Baena; and when he had acquired the indispensable knowledge, he received Holy Orders, with no less satisfaction to his friends than consolation and joy to himself.

Cardinal Moscoso was raised to the archiepiscopal chair of Toledo, and took our devout Francis with him; but the latter, in his profound humility and recollection, could not accustom himself to the bustle and life of the ancient capital, and ran off to Jaen without telling anyone. The new prelate, Dr. Andrade, received him as

his virtues deserved, and gave him a benefice in the parish of St. Paul of Baeza, where he had been baptised, and charged him at the same time with the direction and care of the convents of St. Catherine and the Magdalen : and these three duties he discharged with the greatest zeal and exactness. Though his learning was not great, his zeal inspired him with knowledge to give light to the ignorant, consolation to the afflicted, courage to the weak, fervour to the lukewarm, repentance to the obstinate, and, like a good shepherd, to lead his beloved sheep to the pastures of eternal life ; and these he fed in all humility with good reading, as he did not attempt to preach to them, for so he had arranged with his superiors. Sometimes, however, he did ascend the pulpit, and there he gloried on one occasion in having been a matmaker, a trade which he followed even in the midst of his apostolic labours. Everyone was edified at seeing him, in broad daylight, mending and patching the mats of the parish, and he always carried a needle and thread for whatever might turn up. When any duty of importance was offered to him, he always pleaded his inability and lowness of birth ; but if it were an office that might afford him an occasion of humiliation he undertook it with promptness and joy. For this reason he refused to become an officer of the Third Order, but thought nothing of going out daily to ask alms for the blessed souls in purgatory, and the relief of the poor. He attended the hospitals, and looked after the sick with all charity, and showed himself a perfect model of all virtues. It was enough to see him to be edified. Always jovial and modest, he spoke to all and instructed them. To this one he told an innocent jest, which lightened his sadness ; to that one he uttered a pious sentence, which increased his fervour ; to another a loving complaint, with which he corrected him ; to a fourth a prudent advice, with which he taught him ; and to all

some word of consolation or paternal tenderness, with which he gained their hearts.

III.

In spite of his profound humility, he could not prevent the bishop, Dr. Andrade, from recompensing his merits by making him rector of the Missionary Seminary, which he had founded in Baeza, and giving him also a prebend in the collegiate church. But he, as an expert in the way of the saints, who when elevated do not become proud, nor when lowered lose heart, but from everything draw matter for their spiritual improvement, from the hard rock of honour made the pure water of humility flow. When he took possession of it, he said to the assistants, in his own peculiar way: "Does not the matmaker look well, think you, in his choir cloak?" Notwithstanding his dignity, he never kept a servant, nor did he think it beneath him to attend the masons whenever any work was going on in the seminary. And though living in his own country, he was not on that account the less esteemed, particularly by his nuns, whom he directed with as much success as he did those of St. Elizabeth, when he was a priest of St. Ildefonsus of Jaen; on the contrary, all regarded him as a saint, and the very sight of him moved them to despise the grandeur of the world. Nor did his dignity or his duties interfere with the intimate communication he had always had with God. His increasing fervour taught him to find time, amid his numerous occupations, to commune with God and to grow in perfection to the last moments of his life. He died, at the age of 73, on the 9th of January, 1676. His

body exhaled a sweet fragrance, which remained a long time in the room where he expired. They buried him in a sumptuous grave within his own church, and the Lord worked some prodigies through his intercession. For the glory of his trade, in which he rose to such a degree of perfection, some of his handiwork, notwithstanding continual use, remained as good and as fresh as new for fifty years. Father Torres, the annalist of the province of the Observant Fathers of Granada, and Mr. Ramirez Luque, wrote his life.



BLESSED MARGARET, SERVANT IN AN INN.

I.

YOUNG women have an illustrious example of chastity in Blessed Margaret, who did not hesitate to shed her blood for the preservation of that fragrant lily, acquiring thereby the crown of virgin and martyr. It is not with certainty known where she was born, though Louvain, in Belgium, is generally supposed to be her native place. Nor are we aware of the rank or profession of her parents, being simply told, that when she was old enough to go to service, whether through their death or their poverty, she went as servant to a relation of hers named Amandus. He kept an inn; and, besides receiving all classes of guests, he gave charitable shelter to pilgrims and monks. That saintly house presented an agreeable spectacle to men and angels, for master, mistress,

and servant vied with each other in the divine service. But the girl surpassed all in fervour, modesty, and recollection. Not satisfied with performing the duties of her charge with scrupulous fidelity, keeping everything clean and tidy, and strictly obeying her master's orders, she endeavoured to do some work of mercy for some of the guests, in attending to whom she believed she was serving Jesus Christ. Active and industrious, she knew how to perfectly harmonise the exact fulfilment of her duties with works of piety, prayer, and the frequenting of the sacraments. Like one who knew from the misfortune of others the nets in which the world involves incautious youth, and how much it contributes to the glory of God and the Queen of Angels, to consecrate one's self without reserve and completely to the cultivation of virtue, she not only renounced for ever all public spectacles and foolish diversions, where she might run the least risk of staining the purity of her soul, but even made a vow of perpetual chastity, which she observed with supreme care and vigilance. In all that related to this delicate flower, so easily withered, she was so cautious that they called her "Shy Margaret." All was needed to preserve herself unharmed in the midst of the many occasions to which a corrupt world exposes girls of her position; but she omitted nothing she saw was necessary. A constant vigilance over her senses, the mortification of her will, assiduous prayer, a certain gravity and reserve with young men, assisted her to preserve intact the lily of her chastity. How was it possible for her, without being armed at all hours with mortification and prudence, to preserve herself from falling, particularly at service in an inn, where she had to meet all sorts of persons? Continual were the dangers, but incessant also was her vigilance. In dealing with strangers, whose looks often betray their minds, the people of the world avail themselves, as a secure rule

to avoid mistakes, of the adage, "Think ill and you won't be far astray." Margaret, however, animated by solid charity, could suspect ill of no one. She knew, of course, that we are all an abyss of miseries, that the greatest saints can fall, and so she feared and guarded herself against all. She was aware that the enemy is astute, and that the infamous vice, disguising itself in a thousand ways, rarely shows its hideous figure openly, in order to more easily surprise the incautious.

Among the immodest and reckless it will tell indecent and attractive stories; to loose people it will recount, with the appearance of shame, scandalous and provocative acts; with the modest and retiring it will employ the language of hypocrisy. With these it puts on edifying and pious manners, frequents the churches, and, oh! sorrow, even the sacraments, to attract attention by feigned devotion. It praises continence and all virtues. But allow it to slowly captivate the inexperienced heart, and you shall see how it gradually lays aside the mask, and beginning with presents and protests, with expressions of love and fidelity, with the promises of wealth, it goes on to take indecent liberties, it adds insolence to effrontery, and desists not till it sees the innocent dove sacrificed at its feet. Unhappy the girl who lives not in watching and holy fear. Margaret, by avoiding intimacy with men, whether young or old, secular or religious, by repulsing with holy liberty the insolent, frowning at the daring, conducting herself always and in all places with modesty and distrust, was enabled to keep fragrant the frail flower of purity, even in a place like hers. How true it is that it is not the place that makes the saint! The angels sinned in heaven—Adam fell in Paradise! and yet our saint in an inn merited eternal glory. Little she cared whether they said she was cruel or shy; she only thought of pleasing God in all things. This she anxiously prayed for, this she aimed

at in her labours, this she sought to the great edification of all who knew her, particularly her respected employers, into whom she infused a holy contempt for fleeting things, and an enviable avarice of things eternal, to such a degree that Amandus and his wife, resolving to embrace the religious state, sold all they possessed, to bid an eternal farewell to the world. No wonder that Margaret should have a like intention, as some say, when, in a life naturally exposed to dangers and risks, she preserved herself pure and white as a lily among thorns.

II.

The sun was hidden behind the hills ; night was coming on, only a few rays of twilight remaining, which, as a presage of some sad event, tinged a few clouds in obscure purple, when a knock came to the door of the inn. They were in appearance three decent, but in reality three wicked travellers, who, aware of the plans of the owners, and greedy for the proceeds of their property, came to ask lodging in Amandus' house. The good man made excuses, and told them he had sold out, and closed his inn, with the intention of going the following day to the monastery of Villers. But they insisted, and the good Amandus, in order to do a work of charity, gave them lodging. To treat them as well as he could, he sent the servant for wine to a tavern, which, up to lately, yet existed in Louvain. Margaret was scarcely gone, when the perfidious robbers, abusing the kindness they had received, threw themselves on the innocent victims, husband and wife, and cruelly assassinated and robbed them of all they had. What a fright for poor Margaret ! The floor covered with blood ! the bodies of her master and mistress pierced

with innumerable wounds, the three assassins yet thirsting for blood; such was the scene which presented itself to her on her return. In terror she raised her eyes to heaven, and in a moment she found herself assaulted and maltreated by the heartless wretches. To crown her misfortunes, they carried her outside the town, and deliberated what they should do with the chaste dove. One, less sanguinary, but more lascivious than the others, wished to save her life in order to abuse her, under the pretext of making her his wife; but Margaret, inspired with the noblest sentiments, said she would die a thousand times sooner than yield to his base desires and commit treason against the Lord, to whom she had vowed perpetual chastity. Then one of the malefactors stabbed her in the throat, and ran his dagger into her heart, leaving the victim dead at his impure feet. To conceal their crime, they threw the body of the glorious martyr into the Dile.

The day or year in which this lamentable tragedy occurred is not known, but good chronologists place it between the years 1209 and 1212. Soon, as we are told, the God of victory made known how pleasing to Him had been the sacrifice offered on the altar of chastity. We are assured that the sacred relics floated against the current till they became stationary before the town. That same night, Henry I., Duke of Lorraine, from his castle window was viewing the scenery in the moonlight, and he beheld a great splendour on the banks of the Dile, and heard enchanting music. As this phenomenon was repeated several nights, he sent to inquire the cause, and they found the sacred remains of the glorious virgin. When the rumour spread, the people went in crowds to see the holy body floating at rest on the river's current; and the duke in person, accompanied by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, went in search of the venerated treasure. It was placed with great

solemnity in the church of St. Peter, and the Lord glorified it by working remarkable prodigies in favour of those who implored the protection and aid of Blessed Margaret.

Revelations about her fate were not wanting. The souls of the victims sacrificed by the robbers appeared to a devout religious of the Abbey of Villers, and told him that through God's mercy they had been saved, but were yet suffering in purgatory; and when asked about the virgin Margaret, they said she was in the enjoyment of inexplicable glory, and that they owed all the good that was in them to the example and prayers of the chaste girl. All died assassinated, but not all in the same state nor for the same motive. It is not then the sufferings that make martyrs, but the spirit and the cause for which they are endured.



SS. CRISPIN AND CRISPINIAN.

I.

THESE names are celebrated in all the guilds of shoemakers. Yet we gave the preference to St. Nevolon, because his life afforded us more facts for the imitation of artisans than does that of these martyrs. But in order that those who are devout to them may not be deprived of a knowledge, though succinct, of their virtues, we are going to tell all we know of these invincible athletes. They came from Rome with St. Quintin and other apostolic men to preach the faith in Gaul, and fixed their residence in Soissons. Like several other preachers

of that time, they lived by the labour of their hands, and kept a workshop for making shoes in the town. The cheapness of their goods, their charity to all, their amiability and patience, attracted to them many customers among the idolaters. The saints availed themselves of these opportunities to inculcate the importance of salvation, and animate all to embrace Catholicity, the only religion which points out the right road to heaven. Their exhortations, backed up by the sanctity of their lives, gained over many proselytes.

They had been several years thus exercising their apostolate, when that sanguinary persecutor of the Christians, Maximian Hercules, presented himself in Belgic Gaul. Having taken the saintly shoemakers prisoners, the impious tyrant, not content with the ordinary cruelties he inflicted in all parts, handed over these brothers, as some call them, to Rictius Varus, the the most implacable enemy of Christianity. He was Prefect of that part of Gaul, and he subjected the saints to the most terrible tortures to compel them to renounce the faith. But finding they were impregnable and resolved to die for their religion, he ordered them to be beheaded, in 287. Some sceptical critics deny that they were shoemakers, but adduce no reason against the general conviction. Mention is made of these saints in the Martyrologies of St. Jerome, Bede, Florus, Ado, Usward, and others.

A poor shoemaker was selected by God to propagate the imitation of these martyrs. This was Michael Henry Buch, known by the name of "Good Henry." He was the son of a poor farmer in the duchy of Luxemburg, and was remarkable from his infancy for his prudence and piety. Like his types, he always tried to have Jesus present in the midst of his labours, and to do all the good in his power to his fellow-men. He was much grieved at seeing many workmen buried in crass ignorance of

their religion, and in a lamentable forgetfulness of the important affair of their eternal salvation. He laboured with all his might to bring many back to the right road ; he fervently prayed for them, and induced not a few to go to hear the divine word and to fly bad company. When he had succeeded in separating them from the danger, he led them on to pray and to frequent the sacraments, and make during the day frequent acts of faith, hope, and charity. He spent festival days in the church and in performing works of mercy. When his apprenticeship was served, he applied himself with still more zeal to the improvement of his brethren. He listened to the complaints of those at enmity, and reconciled them. He consoled the afflicted, and even in his poverty found means to assist the indigent. Sometimes he covered the naked with his own garments, and took the bread from his mouth to feed the hungry. In order to save, and have the more to give to the poor, he lived on bread and water.

Conducted by Divine Providence to Paris, he steadily pursued the practice of all virtues. Here he formed the acquaintance of the pious Baron de Renty, who was taken by his good qualities and his zeal, and encouraged him to open a shop in order to train up apprentices in the holy fear of God. Henry, with the baron's aid, opened an establishment and began to gather recruits. Thus commenced the brotherhood of shoemakers, who lived under the rule given them by the priest of St. Paul's, approved later on by the Archbishop of Paris, John Francis de Gondi, and inaugurated on the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin in 1645. Henry himself was elected the first prefect.

They rose every morning at five, collected together to make a joint offering of their works, and afterwards each one separately engaged in prayer at fixed hours. They heard a daily Mass, and worked in silence, which

they interrupted with pious hymns, and before dinner they had meditation. On Sundays and holidays they attended the morning and evening services in the church, visited the prisons and hospitals, and every year made a few days' spiritual retreat. Two years after the establishment of this rule, the brotherhood of tailors adopted it, and founded similar houses. Both associations soon spread through the different cities of Europe, and produced in all parts similar good fruit. Henry himself went to found one in Soissons, under the auspices of the bishop, Charles Burlonne, in 1661. The brethren had a superior, elected by vote, who looked after their temporal affairs, and furnished an annual account of income and expenditure. They lived single, without being bound by vow, and dwelt in the same house. The master marked out each one's work, and the product of their labour went to maintain them, the surplus being distributed to the poor. In spiritual matters they were subject to the parish priest. The Paris community was suppressed by royal edict in 1778.

“Good Henry” died in Paris on the 9th of June, 1666, of an ulcer on the lungs, and was buried in the cemetery of St. Gervaise, leaving an eternal memory of his virtues in the humble profession which he embraced by divine vocation.

Reading from the History of the Holy Family.

ESPOUSALS OF MARY—BIRTH AND ADORATION OF JESUS.

EXTREMELY sad and heartrending was the spectacle presented by the world before the coming of Jesus Christ. On one side the Gentiles, who were masters of the greater part of the universe, were daily sinking deeper and deeper in all kinds of vice and disorder, and were involved in the most absurd errors and the most crass ignorance about their origin and end; whilst on the other, the chosen people, immured in a small corner of Judea, had fallen so far from the high and noble sentiments of their ancestors, that they confined all their religion to certain mere external practices, and tried hard to screen their abominable corruption and sordid avarice. It was only the Liberator, foretold by the prophets, who could by his supernatural and divine power raise the world out of such sickening degradation. But whither will the God of sanctity and purity turn his eyes to choose his dwelling?

In a lowly house of Nazareth there lived, unknown to the world, but the object of the special providence of the Almighty, two poor persons united in holy espousals. Two humble work-people they were, who sought only

to comply with the divine will in the exercises of piety, in the labours of their calling, and in the exact fulfilment of all their duties. In their just judgment, all the riches of the world were useless, unless in as much as they contributed to promote virtue and sanctity in their hearts, for the attainment of which God had placed them on earth. And following a course entirely opposed to the customs of their time, and particularly of their own country, they renounced domestic pleasures, and swore to each other to preserve intact the flower of their virginity. These chaste spouses were Mary and Joseph. Conceived without the stain of original sin, Mary, to the strict performance of the humble duties of her house, added such an aggregate of merits, that her astonishing sanctity was the wonder of the angelic spirits themselves. Joseph, chosen by the Blessed Trinity as the spouse of the purest and most holy of all creatures, had by his fidelity and constancy obtained the benedictions of heaven, and had acquired treasures of grace corresponding to the lofty virtues of his beloved spouse. This, indeed, was a happy marriage in the midst of poverty, because it was a holy marriage, in which existed one only desire and one sole will—a marriage which prepared the way, without their knowledge, for the greatest of all imaginable favours, to have for son the very Son of God, the Word incarnate.

There are gospels extant sanctioned in a measure by their antiquity, though not authorised by the Church, the infallible mistress of truth, which say that the holy Virgin was consecrated from her tenderest years to the service of the temple by her fervent parents, Joachim and Anne, and that the priests gave her to St. Joseph, moved thereto by a remarkable portent. It is said there were many suitors for the hand of Mary; and while deliberating on a proper choice, they saw the rod which Joseph held begin to miraculously bud and blossom, like

unto Aaron's of old, by which our holy patriarch was known to be preferred by God.

Be this as it may, it is certain that it was long foretold that the Messias should be born of a Virgin, and Mary was the virginal root of Jesse, from which the tree of life should spring. And now the happy moment had really arrived—that moment prescribed in the eternal decrees—and six months after the angel had announced to Zachary the future birth of John, the precursor of Jesus Christ, the Archangel Gabriel was again sent by God to Nazareth, a little village of Galilee, to obtain Mary's consent to the incarnation of the Word. When the celestial messenger entered Our Lady's apartment, he saluted her thus: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." The humble Virgin was troubled at such a salutation, but the angel encouraged her by saying: "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and thou shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David his father: and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever. And of his kingdom there shall be no end."

The Virgin was astonished at what she heard, and desirous of knowing whether it could be reconciled with the vow of virginity she had offered to God, she answered, with singular modesty: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" And the messenger of the Eternal replied: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." And to confirm her more and more in the belief of his words, he told her that her cousin Elizabeth had conceived a son in her old age, and that this was the sixth month

for her who had been sterile, because there was nothing impossible to God. And then, when Mary had heard the angel's full commission, she gave her consent, saying: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word."

And now, the deep mystery of the Incarnation being wrought the moment that Mary pronounced those consoling and efficacious words, "be it done," the Virgin at once left for the mountains of Judea to congratulate her cousin, and attend to her with sisterly care. After a long journey over a rough road, she reached Hebron, and entering the house of Zachary, saluted her relative with virginal candour. The moment Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the child leaped with joy in her womb, and her own soul was filled with the Holy Ghost. Almost beyond herself with happiness and content, she exclaimed to the Virgin: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord." And then the spotless Virgin, transported with joy, and full of gratitude for the favours of the Omnipotent, enthusiastically burst forth:—

"My soul doth magnify the Lord: And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid: for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is his name. And his mercy is from generation unto generation to them that fear Him. He hath showed might in his arm: He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down

the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath received Israel his servant, being mindful of his mercy. As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed for ever."

Mary remained three months in Elizabeth's house, and performed for her all the works of charity her generous heart suggested. After filling that house with the aroma of her virtues, she went home, glorifying the Lord for the ineffable graces He had showered on her soul.

We do not know for certain whether the glorious patriarch, St. Joseph, accompanied his Spouse on this journey, as some writers assure us; but what the Gospel does tell us is, that when about this time he saw that Mary was with child, alarmed either at the mystery he suspected the Lord had wrought in the Virgin, or at the critical circumstances in which he saw her placed, without knowing the cause, like a just man as he was, who could not doubt of the innocence of his chaste Spouse, he was buried in a sea of affliction and perplexity. What was to be done in these straits? Should he accuse her before the tribunals? Such a course were, in his mind, a crime against the manifest sanctity of Mary. Should he continue to live with her? His delicate conscience, ever anxious to comply with the smallest tittle of the law, did not permit it. In this conflict he was noticed to go about silent and meditative; and finding no other escape from the difficulty, he resolved to secretly abandon the Virgin, and thus save his own scruples without defaming her. Then it was that an angel appeared to him in a dream, and said: "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for He shall save his people from their sins." St. Joseph was tranquillised by this explanation of the mystery, which

had, indeed, already occurred to him; and conquering his humility, which induced him to consider himself unworthy of such a charge, he joyfully consented to keep the Selected of the Eternal company.

Our Lady was now near the end of her nine months of pregnancy, when the emperor, Augustus Cæsar, published an edict commanding all the subjects of his empire to be enrolled. Joseph and Mary were descended from the royal line of David, and consequently had to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem, which was David's city, to be there enrolled in obedience to the imperial decree. The length of the journey, and Mary's state, would appear sufficient to dispense them from such a duty; but the holy consorts humbly and obediently went to Bethlehem, without offering the slightest excuse. When they reached that city, they sought for a lodging; they tried among their relatives and acquaintances to get a corner where to pass the night; but as they were poor, all doors were closed against them, and they were obliged to seek for shelter in a stable near the city, which was exposed to all the inclemencies of the season. The Redeemer of the world, who of His infinite goodness came to preach to us the contempt of riches, honours, and pleasures, which, imposing on the hearts of weak men, far from satisfying them, only excite their devouring thirst, wished to be the first to give us a brilliant example of abnegation and humility, by choosing of His own free will to come to the world in the midst of such poverty and destitution.

The Son of God came from Mary's womb like a ray of light through purest crystal, without detriment to her virginity, or causing the slightest pain to her who had conceived Him without concupiscence. The sovereign Queen of heaven, filled with ecstasy on contemplating before her very eyes the Magnet of her soul, but at the same time pierced with sorrow at not being able

to accommodate the Divine Prince as his dignity deserved and her own maternal instincts suggested, was compelled to lay the Desired of nations on some cold straw in a manger. But all these circumstances entered into the plans of Divine Providence, to prove to us that poverty and a lowly state, far from being opposed to the true grandeur of man, or to the attainment of virtue and sanctity the most lofty, serve, on the contrary, as powerful aids to fix all our aspirations on God, the only object of our eternal felicity. All the goods of the world are nothing without God; and God alone, without other good whatever, is sufficient to satisfy the heart of man, and to make us all completely happy.

In the environs of Bethlehem, where the Son of God was just born, there were many shepherds keeping watch over their flocks. To these simple people rather than to the powerful of the earth, did God wish to first manifest the wonderful event which had just happened in that ruinous and abandoned stable. They were attending to their ordinary work, when suddenly, in the midst of torrents of light, whose vivid rays dispelled the darkness of night, the angel of the Lord appeared to them. At sight of him they stood transfixed with dread; but the celestial messenger animated them thus:—"Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people. For this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger." The angel had scarcely finished when sweetest harmony resounded in the air. It came from a multitude of heavenly spirits, who descended to pay homage to the newly-born God; and offering Him their praises they said:—"Glory be to God on high, and peace on earth to men of good will." When this vision had gone, and while yet the soft echo of the

angels' hymn resounded in their ears, the shepherds said one to another:—"Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass." And they went with haste; and entering the stable they found the Divine Infant and his Mother just as the angels had foretold them. What must have been their joy on beholding that divine Beauty! There, surely, after offering their modest gifts, they would on a supernatural impulse, have adored the Infant God; and would have acknowledged Him as the Author of life, though laid on that poor straw, who, moved by His love, came to lay down His life for us. It was only by doing holy violence to themselves, yet filled with inexplicable joy, could they tear themselves away from that blessed mansion and return to their huts. The certainty of the matter is that they went away praising and glorifying God for all they had seen, and telling it to everyone they met on the way. All was gratification and content: in every hut around nothing was spoken of but the good news. But Mary, the Mother of the Saviour, preserved in her heart and thought over all she had heard from the lips of the simple shepherds.

Our Divine Master, not content with giving us so eloquent a lesson in contempt of the world, from his chair in the manger, with the object of still further lowering our vanity and pride, submitted to one of the most humiliating laws of the Jews, that is, to circumcision. His generous soul would not allow Him to await the sacrifice of the cross, in order to shed his blood for the salvation of men, but urged Him to show us in his tenderest years the anxiety with which He longed to die for our rescue. The Eternal Father, who was accustomed to shed the more rays of glory around His beloved Son the more the latter humbled Himself, also heaped honour on Him on this occasion, by ordering that the high, the glorious, the celestial, the sweetest, the divinest

name of Jesus should be given Him. Jesus is a name above all names ; it is a name at the sound of which all the powers of heaven, of earth, and of the abyss prostrate themselves ; it is a name which contains in itself the titles of Admirable, Counsellor, God, Strength, Father of the Future Ages, Prince of Peace, and others, and still others applied to Him by the prophets ; it is a name more sweet than honey, mere enchanting than the harmonies of heaven ; in fine, it is a name which is the firm hope of sinners, the encouragement of the just, and the joy of the blessed.

When Jesus was born, there appeared in the firmament a new star, foretold by Balaam, as an indication of the birth of the Redeemer. The Magi, who were the priests, astronomers, and philosophers of the East, were struck by the apparition of the new star, and left their own distant countries in search of the promised Messias. After some time these strangers entered Jerusalem, inquiring, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews ? for we have seen his star in the East, and have come to adore Him." At that time Herod ruled over the Jews, that the prophecy of Jacob might be fulfilled, which fixed the coming of the Anointed for the time when the sceptre of Juda should have passed into the hands of foreigners. On this unexpected apparition of the Magi all the inhabitants of the city were troubled ; and particularly the usurper of the kingdom, who was at the time at Jericho for the cure of the disease which in the end brought him to the grave. The impious king feared lest in reality there had been born the Messias destined to free the chosen people : but to make himself more certain he collected the priests and scribes, and consulted them about the place indicated by the prophecies for the birth of Christ. When he made sure that this king should be born in Bethlehem of Juda, for so the prophet Micheas had foretold, he called the Magi apart to answer

their question. He inquired minutely the time the new and mysterious star had appeared, and with refined malice dismissed them, saying: "Go and diligently inquire after the Child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him."

With this the Magi went their way, and behold, the star which they had seen in the East again appeared to them, and, going before, guided them to the poor stable in which the King of Glory was lodged. Joyful indeed were they on again beholding the star, and when they reached the stable it stopped over the place where lay the Saviour; and entering in, they found the Child and his Mother. Illumined by the light of faith, without being scandalised by the poverty of the newly-born, or the humbleness of his surroundings, they bent their knees before the lowly Infant, religiously adored Him, and offered Him rich gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, the symbols of the royalty, divinity, and humanity of Jesus Christ. When the wise men had fulfilled the object of their journey they prepared to return to their homes, passing by Jerusalem to pay their respects to Herod; but the Lord, whose breath can dissipate the wicked plans of the impious, decreed on this occasion to mock the depraved intentions of the tyrant. With this object He sent to them his angel, who appeared to the pilgrims in a dream, and told them not to return to the palace of the Idumean, but to take another road and go home quietly, without seeing him. They carried out these orders punctually, and so frustrated the plans of the impious monarch who had designs on the life of the Divine Infant, fearing lest he might some day be dethroned by Him.



ST. SEVERUS.

LIGHT FROM THE LOWLY.

Series II.

SAINT SEVERUS, WOOL-WEAVER.

I.

ABOUT the middle of the fourth century the Omnipotent raised a humble weaver to the dignity of bishop, that he who had been the model of laborious artisans might become the same of zealous pastors of His Church. According to some writers Severus was born in Milan, whence he went to Ravenna, where he earned his support by weaving wool. With the object of avoiding the risks and dangers of the world, in whose snares he saw not a few entangled, he contracted marriage with a pious girl called Vicencia. The whole anxiety of these holy spouses was to serve God with all their strength, and to foment mutual love and affection, as real Christian married people should. In the course of time the Lord blessed their union with a daughter, whom they called Inocencia. It is needless to say that the child scarcely reached the years to be instructed when her Christian parents turned all their attention to imbuing her with the maxims of virtue, as the

best inheritance they could give her; for well they knew that it is not the riches of the world which make man really happy on earth, but the peace which springs from the exact fulfilment of our duties, and the sure hope of one day inheriting the eternal kingdom of glory. The three lived poorly enough, the mother and daughter spinning and reeling, and the father weaving the wool, yet more happy and contented with their humble lot than the ambitious ones of the world with their fabulous wealth. What is wanting to him who has God in his heart, and what good are all his riches to him who has the devil in it? These thoughts were the rule of conduct of the poor *woolers*, as they were called for a nickname. Enemies to detraction, jests, fraud, and injustice, they knew how to harmonise labour with piety, poverty with almsgiving, and true joy with the penalties of this exile. Thus did this holy family pass their time without minding the madness and vanity of the world, and certainly far from imagining the lofty designs the Omnipotent had with regard to them.

An event happened in the life of our saint which attracted the attention not only of the city but of all Europe. When Marcellinus, Bishop of Ravenna, died, about the year 346, the neighbouring pastors met to name his successor, as usual, and they ordered a Triduum for the Lord to manifest His divine will in a matter of such importance. There was a rumour in the city that God had often, in His ineffable providence, sent a dove which would alight on the head of the elect, and it was believed that a like event would happen now. As Severus was extremely truthful and simple, he gave entire credit to these rumours. The servant of God was busy at his work when the hour for the ceremony came. He made up his mind to attend it, and said to his wife:—"What do you think, Vicencia? I am going to see that miracle they are talking about, and to know on whom the dove will alight." To which his wife answered: "Don't be foolish, and mind your work,

for we stand in need of it. What good will it do you? It is the same to you whether you go or stay, for they are not going to make you bishop: bless yourself, and attend to your business." "No matter, I will go," said the good weaver. "Away with you, then, and as soon as you arrive you will see the dove will alight on you, you may be sure. But, good gracious! how will you go among decent people with those old rags on you.?" But neither joke nor earnest could keep Severus, and folding up his greasy apron, away he went to the church. All the clergy and the magnates of the city were in the temple. As Severus was so poorly clad he hid behind the door, where, without being observed, he could see the whole ceremony. When the prayer was over, and all was in deep silence, a dove was noticed fluttering in the air, and it went and alighted on Severus. The saint, ashamed that a man in such rags should attract the attention of so respectable a congregation, scared it away. But seeing that no matter how he hunted it the dove alit the second and third time on the poor weaver, the prelates and people were astonished, and recognising in it the hand of God, they proclaimed him bishop. Several acquaintances ran to tell the news to Vicencia, and she answered, laughing:—"Oh! of course, he would make a splendid bishop without a word in his head." But hearing it was no joke, and others coming with the same news, she called her daughter, and the two ran to the church to make sure of the fact. Astounded at the event, they fell on their knees and gave thanks to God, who exalts the humble and humbles the proud.

II.

Severus was sent to Rome, and was consecrated bishop by Pope Julius. The new pastor, persuaded that the Lord would exact a rigorous account from him of the discharge of the dignity he had just received, displayed extraordinary zeal in the interest of his flock. He knew

that the Sovereign Judge is not content with pretexts, and that it is not enough to say to Him: "I have guarded the vineyard of the Lord," whilst from human respect, from a love of false peace, thorns and thistles are allowed to grow. He knew that the truth cannot be hidden from His eyes, and he endeavoured in everything to follow the dictates of reason, and to despise flattery and lies. With only the Christian doctrine, the compendium of the most holy and finished code, in which is found the solution of the deepest problems about our origin, our duties, and our end, with only the Catechism he guided his flock with all security to salutary pastures, and kept it away from the poisonous fields of impiety and heresy. He was one of the bishops who attended the Council of Sardica in defence of the Catholic Faith. He was beloved and venerated at home and abroad, not only for his zeal and heroic virtues, but for the prodigious wisdom which the Holy Ghost infused into him. And the numerous miracles with which the Lord illustrated his career contributed not a little to gain him the respect of all.

As soon as Severus was elected and consecrated bishop, according to the custom and the canons of the Church, he separated from his spouse, never more to see or treat with her except as a sister. The holy bishop guided her and her daughter with saintly counsels on the road of virtue, and one and the other so co-operated that they daily grew in sanctity. The mother put on a widow's veil, and the daughter a virgin's, and all were edified by their life and Christian deportment. At last came the final hour for Vicencia, now mature for heaven, and she was buried in a poor grave. After a little the daughter followed her, to the great grief of her father, who dearly loved her. Is it any wonder a father should weep for the death of a beloved child? Grace does not destroy nature, but only elevates and perfects it. The holy man, though submissive to the Divine Will, when laying her in the tomb wept bitterly in sight of the

people, who were deeply moved by the tears of their venerable pastor. But this was not able to cool in the slightest degree his zeal for the salvation of his flock; on the contrary, as the persons he most loved in this world were leaving him, and the tremendous day of his own account was drawing nigh, he redoubled his efforts to bring back the stray sheep to the fold, and to enliven the spirit of those who remained firm and constant. His last hour arrived. After gathering a copious harvest of merit, now at the humble trade of weaver, now in the noble dignity of prelate, he received from heaven a notice that the day of his departure was at hand. When it arrived he celebrated the divine offices with all solemnity, surrounded by his priests and people; and then, as usual with him, delivered to them a fervent sermon, exhorting them to preserve pure and intact the Catholic Faith, and to mutually foment Christian union and charity. When this was over he ordered them to open the grave in which his wife and daughter rested, and lying down in it, clothed in his sacred vestments, giving a last adieu to his flock, and blessing the Lord of Mercies, he expired full of days and virtues. His death occurred at the end of the fourth century, about the year 390. The Most High honoured the tomb of that holy family with repeated miracles. Thus does the Lord reward those who are docile to His inspirations, and endeavour to sanctify themselves in the state to which He calls them.

SAINT CUTHMAN, SHEPHERD.

I.

BEAUTIFUL and rare examples of filial love did a simple shepherd, educated in the solitude of the fields, bequeath to the faithful. This was Cuthman, an Englishman by birth who, according to the Bollandists, lived at the end of

the ninth century.* There flourished, in him a singular obedience to and yearning love for his parents, and these flowers were cultivated by them with extreme care in the docile heart of their son. Poor in temporal goods, but rich in the gifts of heaven, they taught him from his earliest years to honour and love God by strict compliance with the divine commandments. "Son," they used to say to him, "fear not men; nor through respect for them ever break the divine law, for all the harm they can do is to deprive us of this miserable life, which sooner or later we must lose. But fear God, who can deprive us of eternal life, and bury us for our sins in never-ending torments." These Christian maxims were so engraved on the heart of Cuthman, that, growing daily in virtue and grace, he was the delight of his poor parents, who hoped he should be the staff of their old age. Whilst yet but a child he appeared to be a grown-up man in the correct judgment he formed of things. Never, though poor, did he allow himself to be dazzled by the lustre of the fleeting goods of earth, for he knew that they were only apparent goods, soap bubbles, which fascinate with their varied colours the eye of the ignorant, but vanish when touched; aloe-juice mixed with honey, which is sweet to the taste, but in reality fills the heart with bitterness: a poison which causes death, though decked off to the eye or served up in golden cups. Hence he avoided the vain and dangerous diversions of the tavern, and the meetings of dissolute youth, who seek after pleasures unworthy hearts created for God. Trained in his happy poverty by the teaching and example of his parents, he seemed like a man who regarded the world as a disguised, lying, and seductive enemy, which promises pleasures, but spills over the heart of its followers a chalice of gall. Thus did those Christian parents rear the son the Lord had given them: and they certainly had no cause to repent it.

*Butler says he flourished about the eighth century.

For as those who with impious maxims and perverse examples corrupt their innocent offspring, generally gather in the end briers and thorns, and have to bewail the uneasiness and anxiety which their dissolute and dissipated children without the slightest compunction cause them; so on the contrary, those who bring up those tender souls in piety and the fear of God, usually obtain in their filial affection the reward of their paternal toil. And thus did it happen with these pious parents. As soon as the eager youth had strength to help them, he desired to share in the domestic labours, and was always ready to obey their orders, how difficult so ever they might appear. When sent to mind his father's flock, he was extremely careful of his sheep; and he managed so that he had always some little time to spare to relieve his parents of the burden of their toil. To this exactness in the fulfilment of his duties he knew how to join piety to God, now by giving himself to prayer in the midst of his pastoral labours, now by meditating on those Christian maxims, with which he was imbued, thus corresponding to the wishes of his parents.

He never caused them pain; he never disobeyed their orders, nor showed signs of displeasure in fulfilling any of their commands, for he looked on his parents as the representatives of God. It happened one day that as he was herding as usual, the dinner-hour arrived, at which, according to his father's instructions, he should be at home; but as he had no one to take his place, and, on the other hand, was afraid to leave the flock without express orders, he was for some time perplexed, and knew not what to do. He stopped a little in doubt and began to think; and at last, after having recourse to God, he was moved by a secret impulse, and taking his crook, drew a circle with it round his charge, and said: "In the name of God I command you not to pass this line," and he went home, confiding in Divine Providence. Nor was he disappointed, for on his return he

found the sheep collected as he desired. Now he knew what to do in future, whenever any necessity should occur, or he should have to obey some order, or wish to attend to his prayers; and his devotion was deepened very much by these favours. With a son so amiable, devout, and solicitous for the good of the house, and so favoured of heaven, that family lived surrounded by enviable peace and happiness. But when they least expected it, the Lord visited them with their cross.

II.

The Almighty called away the father, who died a Christian death, leaving his wife in deepest affliction for a loss so irreparable. She found, however, in Cuthman the heart of a true son, a son who was always and on all occasions the soother of her grief, the light of her eyes, the balsam of her affliction, the staff of her old age. That charitable son, tried in every way—left no stone unturned—to mitigate the pain of his afflicted mother. And, indeed, his Christian maxims, the only ones capable of infusing true peace into a heart in tribulation, no less than his prompt obedience and incessant care, sometimes did almost appease the sorrow of the poor widow. Attentive and laborious, he not only carried on the business of the house, but even tried to save a little, that he might be able to make some present to his mother. The good youth got it into his head that the principal thing that God wanted from him was not great fasts and corporal mortifications, but that he should tenderly look after her who gave him being, with the firm hope that the Lord would take as done to Himself whatever he should do for her, and give him in return the crown of eternal glory. However, no day passed in which his prayers did not ascend like a fragrant cloud of incense to the throne of the Almighty, whence through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin streams of grace

and sweetness flowed on his soul. In this way were son and mother passing their exile, conforming in all things to the Divine Will, content with their poverty and mingling acts of piety with their labour, like good Christians, when sickness came to weaken and almost paralyse the good widow.

Then more than ever did the filial affection of Cuthman show itself. He neglected all else to attend to the care and consolation of his mother. He joyfully bore her peevishness and ill-humour, the offspring of old age and of suffering and privation. He tried to please her without betraying the least sign of weariness or impatience, firmly convinced he could do nothing more agreeable to God. As her illness was a long one, and Cuthman could not leave her to attend to his business, the little they had was gradually consumed, till they were reduced to the direst straits. The good shepherd knew that God could provide for them in extraordinary and miraculous ways, but he did not hope nor ask for this, for they are not always the means most suited to His glory or the good of our souls. His industrious charity consequently sought a way by which he could tend his sick mother and implore his neighbour's charity. For this purpose, with the little that remained he made a litter in form of a cart, which he could draw without inconvenience to her. Contented with this invention, he placed the patient on it, and leaving his hut and his village, went through the world to beg the necessaries of life for her.

III.

In this nomadic life, naturally dissipated and exposed to many dangers, this good son found means to sanctify himself. He suffered with heroic resignation the privations which such a life entailed; and the scoffs of men made no impression on him, nor did the obstacles he met dishearten him. Animated by a lively faith, he

hoped for everything from God; and his filial love rendered sweet that which would have proved bitter to others with less virtue than our saint. When passing one day through a meadow where some men were mowing, the cords attached to his cart broke, and he knew not how to get on; but without uttering an impatient word, he blessed the Lord, as he did in all his mishaps, and tried to get out of his difficulty. For this purpose, finding nothing better at hand, he cut some willow twigs, and plating them together, fixed them to his cart. The mowers, amused at the simplicity of the servant of God, began to mock and jibe him, and as people without the fear of God usually do, ended by loading him with taunts and nicknames. The good Cuthman held his tongue, suffering all for the love of Jesus, but soon heaven spoke on behalf of the innocent. The sky was suddenly covered with dark clouds and discharged on the wretches such a terrible tempest that they could not, though late, but acknowledge in it the just hand of the God of vengeance. Cuthman felt for the misfortune of the mockers, but could only bless God, who thus protects his innocent servants.

Thankful for the ineffable favours he had received from the Omnipotent, who consoled him in his painful toil and discomforts, which he always bore patiently to please God and assist his mother, he made a vow to build with alms a temple wherever his cords should again break, providing the patient should receive no hurt. Having arrived at Steninges, a place in Normandy,* they suddenly broke, and the poor old widow's cart was upset. Cuthman was alarmed at the accident, believing his mother was seriously hurt; but finding she was not injured in the least, he joyfully exclaimed: "Sweet Jesus mine, who in my journey hast provided me with food and clothing, I return Thee infinite thanks for Thy Fatherly providence. Without being an acceptor of

* Butler says, more correctly, in England.

persons, Thou lovest us from all eternity. Behold me here ready to fulfil my promise. Poor and wretched I am, but with Thy aid I can do everything. Assist me to do the work with which Thou didst inspire me."

Near Steninges, on the side of a hill, now cultivated with great care, and watered by two springs which fertilise it, there was then nothing but underwood, the home of the wolf and the viper. Cuthman, assisted by the generosity of some farmers of the neighbourhood, built a hut to shelter his mother, and with the abundant alms he received laid the foundation of a small church. Crowds from the surrounding country flocked to the place, not only to see the new building, but to hear the holy words of the servant of God. The saint toiled the whole day like any of his workmen, and passed a good part of the night in prayer. "Lord," he used to say, "this will be the place of my rest: hither shall I come all the days of my life to render Thee my poor homage." The servant of God did not rest till he saw his work crowned with success. They were one time in a great difficulty when one of the principal beams bent, to the imminent danger of bringing down the whole building. Cuthman had recourse to the remedy for all his ills—prayer—the more efficacious from his spirit of simplicity, abnegation, meekness, humility, and obedience—virtues which had cast deep roots in the heart of the saint. In their greatest straits a devout pilgrim appeared on the scene, and said to them: "Why are you sad?" And when told the cause of their grief he answered: "You will see how soon this can be remedied," and the beam was miraculously put right in a second. When Cuthman saw the prodigy, he threw himself at the stranger's feet, and said: "I beseech thee, tell me who thou art?" And the pilgrim answered: "I am the Lord, to whom thou art raising this temple, in which my name shall be glorified." And on saying this, He disappeared. Notwithstanding this favour, the good shepherd did not recede from his holy resolves and exemplary conduct in

the slightest degree, convinced that he only shall be crowned who shall fight to the end. On the contrary, redoubling his fervour, he dedicated himself with increased solicitude to the divine service and the care of his sick mother. At last he had the gratification of seeing the Lord glorified in the holy house he had built to His honour, and to which all the Catholics of the neighbourhood piously flocked. A few years after the death of his mother, whom he attended with unrivalled care till he closed her eyes, Cuthman also went to glory to receive the eternal reward of his labours, and particularly of his edifying filial love. God glorified this servant of His with many miracles, as well during his life as after his death. His name is found in the missal used by the Anglo-Saxons before the Norman Conquest of England. (His feast was kept on the 8th of February.)

ST. SERENUS, GARDENER, MARTYR.

I.

SERENUS, a Greek, anxious to live forgotten by the world and dedicated entirely to the service of God, sold all he had, and leaving country, friends, and acquaintances, retired to Panonia, there to lead an obscure and penitent life. The saint knew how much seclusion contributes to spiritual improvement; and hence all the goods of the world appeared to him as nothing, and he hesitated not to renounce them on condition of securing a retired life, far from the bustle and traffic of ordinary existence. It is certain that taking part in the talk of the day will soon change a devout and recollected person into a distracted and dissipated one; and, on the contrary, by avoiding idle conversations, he quickly becomes devout and fervent, and a portrait of Jesus Christ. Would to God that souls desirous of perfection would become convinced of this truth, and, like St. Serenus, purchase this retirement at the cost even of all the world loves

most! Though I may wander a little from my subject, I will here dwell on the dangers of dissipation, and, as a consequence, on the advantages the saint derived from this costly withdrawal from the world.

He who does not live an interior life seeks in the exterior something to lighten his heart, and takes pleasure in conversations, useless at least, if not vain and dangerous—conversations which, if it were only the loss of precious time incurred in them, would be highly objectionable. But the worst is that they leave the heart so distracted, so dry, and disgusted with every exercise of virtue, that all the practices of piety, and all the ordinary works that might be sanctified by recollection and purity of intention are lost on account of the want of care in performing them. And so, from one mistake, apparently so light, as is the loss of time in talking about foolish things, springs another much more serious one, which is the waste of the rest of the day, and of all the merits which might be gained by employing it properly. If we consider it well, we shall see that the treasures of grace we could heap up are innumerable, not only by hearing Mass, reciting the Rosary, reading pious books, and other spiritual and holy exercises, but also by our ordinary labours, which, though temporal, may be spiritualised by obedience or pure intention. And all is lost through dissipation, which prevents us from doing good works with the attention and devotion required to make them meritorious, and from sanctifying indifferent ones, as we do when our end in performing them is to please God. And all this is lost by not firmly putting down our foot on worldly talk, which usually is the root of all the distractions and idleness in which time is uselessly squandered.

Hence the Holy Ghost, with all the earnestness the matter deserves, not only counsels us to utilise the day He gives us, but does not wish us to lose the smallest particle or the slightest moment of that day; and as all days are holy and suitable for doing good and increasing

our deserts, He exhorts us to not let a single point of our lives pass unawares. For, as those who deal in gold and precious stones will not lose the very filings, because they know there is great value even in small quantities, so we should deal with time, whose value is so great that a single moment may merit an eternity of glory or deserve an eternity of punishment. The more of heaven do we gain the more of time we employ well. Hence St. Bernard says that "time is worth as much as God." What a pity we do not esteem it at its just value, and only try to kill time! There is nothing more precious than time, and yet the lukewarm think there is nothing more vile and of less value. These unhappy people lose much in losing it, for if, as they say, gold is what gold is worth, he who loses time loses heaven, for its moments are worth an eternity of glory.

And thus our saint was so solicitous of availing himself of time, of which intercourse with his acquaintances and friends, and the care of his property robbed him, that he renounced all, that he might not lose the smallest particle of so precious a treasure. He was so convinced of the immense value that an instant contains, that he was as avaricious of time as the miser is of his gold. And really we should be more on our guard against those who deprive us of it without our knowing than against robbers who might wrench from us fleeting goods with open violence: for we could entertain hopes of some day recovering the latter, but time once lost can never be restored. Hence, even in the shades of paganism, Seneca said: "Give not your time to anyone, for know that it is a gift so precious, that the most grateful man to whom you may give it, can never return it, nor give you its equivalent." Love can be repaid with love, and a present with a greater one; but time prodigally wasted on another can receive no due recompense; on the contrary, the visit of to-day, with which you pay that of yesterday, is a new loss of the time which God gave you to earn fresh treasures in heaven.

II.

Through the sacred avarice of time, and for the purpose of increasing his wealth of grace, Serenus took up his residence in Sirmium, where, with what he had preserved from the price of his property he bought a garden, that he might unite prayer with labour. He cultivated it with great care, and from its fruits derived what he needed for his support, and the relief of the indigent. He now thought he had secured the peace and retirement he desired. He contentedly laboured to improve the time the Lord gave him, mingling the exercise of piety with the cultivation of his little property, but, in order to escape from the rigours of the persecution excited against the Christians, he was forced to abandon his retirement, and seek a more secure asylum. But his love of silence and a retired life soon urged him to return to his beloved garden, and leave himself in the hands of Divine Providence. Needless to say that now as ever his whole anxiety was to please Jesus in everything, that he might merit to go with Him to the espousals of the Lamb, and sit with Him at the table of the strong, and victoriously struggle in temptation against his enemies. When his body, fatigued with toil or penance, sought for rest, Serenus did not admit the excuse of some people, that the eternal reward for which he laboured may be secured in an hour, and that there is time enough for everything.

No; like a good dealer in celestial pearls, he was not deceived by the suggestions of hell, but worked hard and constantly to merit more and more grace in the eyes of Jesus Christ. What a treasure he laid up by this laudable conduct! Fools that we are! If in an hour we can secure an eternal good, why do we not add to the treasure by employing well the hours we waste in stories and slander, and so become rich in a short time, heaping eternal wealth on eternal wealth? These were the thoughts which animated Serenus in his

labours, very different, indeed, from those entertained by her who was the cause of his death.

One day, when our saintly gardener was at work, a lady with her two daughters came in to take a walk. When Serenus saw them, he asked: "What do you want here?" "I am in love with your garden," answered the lady, "and I have come for a little amusement." "Better you were at home in your own house," said Serenus. "Women of your condition do not come out to walk at this hour." And the good gardener, penetrating the unhappy lady's intention, added: "Some other motive has brought you here. Go away as quick as you can, for I am not the man you think, and be more careful for the future." They went away crestfallen, and Serenus thought over the great dangers which the world's servitors incur. There is much to meditate on, and even to learn in their mistakes. And in reality, if we throw our eyes over that valley of tears, we shall be filled with confusion when we see how lukewarm we are in seeking for heaven, and how anxious worldlings are to gain perishable goods. Without considering the toil and unrest the seekers after pleasure have to undergo, see how absorbed the majority of men are in their gains and speculations, without losing a moment's time. Artisans, who labour and sweat from sunrise to sunset, have sometimes to be forced to rest and observe a holiday. Farmers in their fields, merchants at their desks, professional men at their books, all are as solicitous about their respective interests as if life depended on them. But what neglect and carelessness in the only business that really concerns them—the sanctification of their souls! But why do I say carelessness, when many, like these unhappy women seek themselves their eternal ruin, and cannot suffer that any charitable soul should try to put them on the right road? And so it happened with this unfortunate one.

III.

The lady was vexed at the salutary advice of Serenus, and went away resolved on vengeance, not alone for the insult of being ordered out of the garden, but also because she could not carry out her infamous intention. She immediately wrote a feeling letter to her husband, who was in the army of Maximianus, complaining bitterly of the violence she pretended Serenus had offered her. The husband, as soon as he received the complaints of his wife, went to the emperor to demand justice for his outraged honour. "Sire," said he, "whilst we sacrifice our lives and shed our blood in your majesty's service, our wives, unavoidably separated from us, are exposed to the violence and sensuality of infamous corrupters." As soon as the sovereign was informed of the injury the officer thought he had suffered, he gave him a rescript addressed to the governor of the province, in which he commanded him to see that full satisfaction was given to the outraged husband.

In the meantime Serenus was occupied in cultivating his little property, and more so in enriching his soul with heavenly merits, living joyful and content, and almost entirely forgetful of the scene which occurred some days before in his garden. The devout gardener was far from thinking of the tempest which was gathering around him. The officer, as soon as he got the emperor's letter, left immediately for Sirmium in hot haste. He presented the rescript to the governor, and demanded vengeance for the outrage offered him through his wife. "Well," said the governor, "who is the insolent wretch who dared to insult the honour of a lady whose husband followed the emperor in his campaign?" "He is a low gardener," said the officer, "called Serenus." After inquiring into all the circumstances, the governor commanded that he should be taken and brought before him, that he might receive due punishment. As soon as the prisoner arrived the judge asked him what was his

name. "I am called Serenus," answered the gardener. "What business do you follow?" "I am a gardener." "How did you dare," replied the governor, "to insult the wife of an officer so distinguished in the imperial service?" "With great respect to you," said Serenus, "I can assure you I never in my life insulted any woman." When the judge saw that the accused roundly denied the crime with which he was charged he ordered him to be put to the torture till he acknowledged the offence committed in his own garden. When Serenus heard his garden mentioned he remembered the scene which occurred with the lady, and added:—"Now I recollect that some time ago a lady came at a wrong hour to take a walk, as she said. I do not deny that I then took the liberty to tell her that it was not proper for a person of her sex and rank to go out for a walk to such a place at such a time." The sincerity of the gardener, and his prudent answer, opened the eyes of the husband to the conduct his wife observed in his absence, and he was covered with shame at his haste and impetuosity, and did not again ask the governor for vengeance against a man he believed was thoroughly innocent.

IV.

There was a something or other in the face of the servant of God, through mortification and constant intercourse with the Lord in the midst of his toil, which plainly told everyone who saw him that he was a disciple of Jesus Christ. The fervent gardener knew how to avail himself of the very objects of his care, to raise his heart to heaven, and daily grow in perfection. The flowers, the shrubs, the trees, the streams, the birds, appeared to call to him and invite him, the first with their aromas, and the second with their murmurs and songs, to bless and love his Creator. The former would silently teach him that as through the careless-

ness and negligence of the gardener they died smothered by noxious herbs or yielded no fruit for want of pruning, so the soul without constant vigilance and the frequent watering of prayer, and without the pruning of mortification, instead of giving the fruit of solid virtues loses its juice in vanities, and produces nothing but the weeds of sin. These thoughts animated him to labour in his own sanctification, and impressed on his countenance the character of mortification and penance.

This, and the freedom with which he dismissed the officer's wife from his garden to avoid all danger, made the governor suspect that Serenus was a Christian. Continuing, then, his examination, but changing the subject, he asked him what his religion was. "I am a Christian," answered Serenus, without hesitating a moment. "How did you elude," replied the judge, "the emperor's orders commanding all to offer sacrifice to the gods?" "The Lord so arranged it," answered the saint, "as He now has disposed that I should confess my faith openly." "Do you know," said the governor, "the penalty incurred by those who refuse to adore our gods?" "I know it," replied the martyr, "and I am prepared to give a thousand lives sooner than deny Jesus, my God, the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead." The president, full of rage at the frank and Christian confession of the saint, ordered him to be beheaded in punishment of his obstinacy. They immediately conducted the invincible athlete to the place of punishment, and when his head was separated from his body his soul flew to put on the eternal crown of martyrdom. This glorious tragedy took place about the the year 303, according to the Bollandists, and according to Godescard, on the 23rd of February, 307. God grant that we may all imitate his care and diligence in availing ourselves of time, and his serene disregard of human respect. Amen.

ST. MARGARET OF CORTONA, DRESSMAKER.

I.

ST. MARGARET OF CORTONA, so called because she spent the greater part of her life and died in that city, was born in Labiano, a place in the diocese of Chiusi, in Tuscany, about the year 1250. Her parents were good Christian labourers, who gave her a virtuous education. She could scarcely lisp when her mother taught her devout prayers, which Margaret never forgot, and recited with great fervour even in the last years of her pilgrimage in this valley of tears. But unfortunately, about her seventh year she lost her diligent and tender mother, and with her the stimulus and love for virtue and the practices of piety. The poor child, when she found herself deprived of the affection of her mother, and had to bear with the hardness of a stepmother, her father having married again, sought elsewhere the love she missed at home, and, carried away by the impulses of corrupt nature, abandoned herself to a dissipated and libertine life. Gifted with a lively disposition and singular beauty, she thought of nothing but adorning herself and attracting the looks of men. Unfortunate girl! She knew not that immodest adornments and luxury are the ruin of chastity. Tertullian thinks it impossible for a girl to be pure and chaste who intentionally tries to look well in the eyes of those who see her, or to please Christ if she desires to please men, for it is the same as to serve two masters, and Christ will not be half-served. And St. Cyprian asks: "Do you imagine that the bold attempt to adorn and dress yourself to the offence of God, who made you, will pass unpunished? Do not tell me you are virtuous, and that it is not to please men. It is bad enough in any case to see you forgetful of God, and amusing yourself and taking pleasure in such things." Let this prudent counsel be taken to heart by those who, when

dressing loosely, allege that chastity is not in the garment but in the soul. This, I am sure, poor Margaret would say also, and her rashness carried her over the precipice. The short resources of her family could not, and even if they could her parents would not, meet the demands of her immoderate adornments and diversions. To supply herself with means she so abandoned herself to a lascivious life that, despite the corrections of her father and the warnings, perhaps a little bitter, of her stepmother, in the flower of her youth she became the stumbling-block of her neighbours. There is no doubt that the anxiety for grand things, inherited from their mother Eve, is the most ordinary bait with which the devil hooks young girls and hurries them to ruin.

The incautious Margaret fell into the snares of one of those infamous men who boast of their corruption and impure conquests. A young gentleman of the neighbouring city of Montepulciano, struck by the beauty of our maiden, and resolved to leave no stone unturned to satisfy his impure desires, took her home with him, not to marry her, but to live an irregular life with her. Wretched the girl who allows herself to be carried away by that destructive luxury which unfortunately has invaded both town and country! Sooner or later she will fall into the traps of the enemy, to the loss of her innocence and virtue. Through it was Margaret blinded in a vicious life for nine years, without thinking of the abyss that was open at her feet. The Lord embittered her pleasures; He took away the false peace which those separated from God sometimes enjoy; He gave her strength of heart to fly from eternal ruin; but, blinded by her disordered passions, the unhappy girl did not, or would not, understand the language of divine mercy.

II.

One day, however, bemoaning her errors like a prodigal daughter, she resolved to arise from her degrada-

tion, and escape from the flames of hell, which hissed at her very feet, ready to devour her. What had occurred to Margaret to thus awaken her from the profound lethargy in which she was buried? The Lord gave her a mute but eloquent lesson on the vanity of mundane pleasures, and she opened a docile ear to the inspirations of her loving father. Her lover had gone from home for some days, and Margaret was in the house, when the little dog which accompanied him returned, and began to bark in the most melancholy way. The poor woman did not dream of any accident to the gentleman, and overlooked the sad warnings of the animal. One day passed, and another, and the dog continued barking and dragging her by the clothes, as much as to say: "Come with me, for they have murdered my master!" Margaret began at last to suspect there was something wrong, and fearing the worst from the dog's manner, she followed him whither he led her. As soon as they reached a ravine where there was a heap of withered branches, the dog ran to it and began to scrape the earth, crying sadly all the time. Then Margaret, removing with trembling hands the branches and earth which formed the heap, found the dead body of her lover, already converted into a mass of corruption, and giving out an intolerable stench. You may imagine the shock she got on beholding so horrible a spectacle.

His enemies and rivals had met the unfortunate man and killed him, inflicting innumerable wounds on his body, and to hide their crime had thrown him into a hollow, and covered over the place with earth and branches. When the poor woman came to herself she clearly realised what impure pleasures end in. That corrupted body, already full of worms, which issued from every wound, placed the end of worldly goods in evidence before her eyes. And then, again, her afflicted soul was besieged by a troupe of melancholy considerations on the lot of the spirit of him whom she had loved so madly and excessively. "Oh! his soul! where

is his soul? . . . Is it in hell?" said a voice within her heart, which made her tremble with fear, and covered her with a cold sweat. "What are now all his guilty pleasures to him? Fuel to keep alive the eternal flames! For a momentary joy an eternal pain! For every instant of pleasure a torment without end.

III.

These salutary thoughts made her tremble for herself, seeing herself on the brink of that fearful precipice, exposed to fall in, if that instant the clock of eternity had struck the hour of her death. Turned into a sea of tears, alarmed at the blackness of her soul, more foul and horrid than the devil himself, she threw herself on the floor in deep compunction, imploring mercy, and transpierced with a lively sorrow, she thought of nothing but bewailing her sins and beginning a life of penance. First of all she should fly from the scene of her past danger, and so she resolved as soon as possible to leave Montepulciano, to go and throw herself at her father's feet, like a prodigal daughter, penitent and weeping. But he, instigated by the harshness and cruelty of his wife, would not listen to the sighs and laments of the poor girl, but cast her out as the disgrace of the family. Great were the combats which the penitent's heart sustained through that repulse. She was yet only four-and-twenty years of age and extremely beautiful, and she saw in a dissolute life a path strewn with flowers and happiness, and was strongly tempted to return to her disorders, presuming that God in the end would have mercy on her. Ah! the Lord has promised pardon to those who repent, but He has not promised hope to those who resist His call. How many, through vain presumption, deferred their conversion and were damned? Margaret struggled bravely, and that Divine Father, who is ever waiting with open arms to give us the embrace of peace and the kiss of pardon, called her

again in loving accents, supporting her in that struggle, decisive, perhaps, of her future sanctification or of her eternal reprobation. "Fear not, Margaret," said the good Jesus to her, "henceforth I will be your Father and Benefactor."

Now fixed in her good resolutions, she wept night and day over her sins; and anxious to repair the scandal she had given by her evil ways, she went to the parish church of Aliviano, dressed in penitential garb, and with a rope round her neck, to publicly ask pardon of her neighbours, and protest before all that she repented of having been, by her bad example, the occasion of ruin to anyone. But this did not appease the stepmother, nor soften the father. All abandoned her.

Then the poor thing, seeing herself despised and driven from home, went to the neighbouring city of Cortona, where some charitable ladies received her and a son she had by her lover. The first thing she took care to do here was to make a general and fervent confession of all her sins, as the beginning and foundation of a new life. She went to the Franciscan church, and there, weeping and sighing, relieved her heart in the ear of one of the observant religious. She also entreated to be allowed to wear the penitent habit of the Third Order of the Seraphic Patriarch. The prudent confessor animating her to be faithful to her good resolutions, gave her hopes of obtaining from the superiors the permission required. But three years passed before she got it, during which she practised every kind of virtue. She avoided, as she would death, everything which could be an incentive or fuel to her passions; and though, through the goodness of the ladies with whom she was, she might live almost delicately, yet through a spirit of penance, and looking on herself as unworthy to tread the earth, she never ate flesh meat; she slept on hard boards or on the floor, and gave every moment she could to prayer and the practices of piety. The Lord, who is never outdone in generosity, sinking in

profound oblivion all the sins of the saint, often visited her with celestial consolations, and animated her to pursue the path she had entered on.

IV.

The Franciscans were now satisfied with the constancy of the penitent, and with the heroic examples of virtue, with which she edified everyone, and gave her the habit of the Third Order without fear of her dishonouring it by her conduct. And this favour served to redouble her fervour, by increasing her mortification and striking deep roots of humility, which made her look on herself as unworthy of be regarded, much less saluted, by men. For the love of the world she substituted so ardent a love for God that she felt dislike and aversion to everything that could flatter the senses, and she burned with a lively desire of sacrificing herself in the flame of charity. When praying one day with extraordinary fervour before an image of Jesus crucified, she had the happiness of hearing from the Divine lips these sweet words: "Tell me, poor thing, why you are weeping. What do you want?" "You, Lord, and only you; for having you I want nothing." This holy and ardent desire to please Jesus was her daily support; and finding that in the service of the ladies, in whose house she lived, she could not have the recollection she desired nor the opportunity of giving loose rein to her penances, she took a little room where she could dwell alone with her son, procuring the necessaries of life with her needle as a dressmaker. She never went out except to go to the church, to do an act of charity or to look for work to sew during the day. She rose very early in the morning and went to the church of the Franciscans, where she heard Mass and spent some time in meditation. After satisfying her spirit of devotion she went home to renew it in union with her work. She usually employed herself in dressmaking, sewing and mending whatever was given to her; and with her earn-

ings and some alms given her by pious people, she had enough to meet her light expenses and to largely succour the poor.

Content with bread and water and some raisins, she never lit a fire except to prepare food for the indigent. Her charity to the needy was very great. When she had no money to give them, she distributed among them whatever she found in the house—plates, glasses, spoons, dresses—and sometimes in the depth of winter stripped herself of her clothes and went half naked, that they might have something to cover them. She saw Jesus in the poor, and grateful for his immense benefits, though herself poor, she did not wish Him to have it to say: “I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat; I was naked and you clothed me not.” The Lord repaid with interest the favours He received from her by the hands of the poor, for He allowed her to taste on earth the sweetness of heaven to the great advantage of her soul, which despised all human delights. From the very beginning of her conversion she conceived such a hatred for her body, the instrument of so many sins and scandals, that not satisfied with tormenting it with severe penances and continual fasts, she would undoubtedly have disfigured her beauty if her confessor, to whom she paid strict obedience, had not prevented her.

V.

The common enemy, envious of the imperishable crown, which the saintly dressmaker was weaving, laid terrible snares for her to make her desist from her Christian enterprise. He tried to persuade her that such great retirement was indiscreet, and so much penance an imprudent cruelty; that with so incessant mortification she was bringing herself prematurely to the grave; in fine, that it was now time to soften her inhuman rigour and take some better food, above all as the Lord had told her that all her sins were pardoned. But

the saint had no difficulty in detecting the serpent tail of him who had transformed himself into an angel of light. Then Margaret, in revenge for this daring of Lucifer, multiplied her penances, and buried herself deeper in evangelical humility. Feeling herself one day more rudely attacked by the violence of the temptation than usual, she lovingly complained to her dear Jesus crucified, and the Lord was pleased to console her thus: "Have courage, my daughter, for no matter how violent the assaults of the enemy may be, I am always with you. Be faithful to the counsels of your director, and fear not; place your strength in my grace, distrust yourself, and you shall conquer." With these favours she strode like a giant along the path of virtue. The more attacked she was by the devil, the deeper did she cast the roots of humility, and the more attached did she become to contempt and insult. Wondering that the people of Cortona did not drive her out of the city and stone her as a monster of the abyss, she would, only for the prohibition of her confessor, who put bounds to her extreme desires of humiliation, have gone out into the streets with a rope round her neck publishing her past errors, that they might shut her up in jail for her iniquities.

In a great measure she drew this profound humility from the assiduous consideration of the passion of Jesus Christ, made for us the opprobrium and disgrace of men. It was also encouraged by the contemplation of the sufferings of the Blessed Virgin, whom she loved as a tender mother, and to whom she had recourse with all confidence in her necessities. When reflecting one day on the cruel torments which Jesus suffered for love of us, she received a precious visit from the Saviour Himself, in which He exhorted her to prepare herself to accompany Him in his sufferings. "Be ready," He said to her, "to sustain a rude combat and bear with great annoyances during your life. As gold is tried in the crucible, so shall you be purified with tribulation, temptations, pains, fear, watchings, tears, hunger,

thirst, cold, nakedness, desolation, and it is only when loaded with the cross that you will enter into glory." "Here I am, Lord, ready to suffer for love of Thee all the torments of the world. My God! who could refuse to suffer when he reflects on what Thou didst bear for us?" By meditation on these pains she animated herself to bear, in silence and without complaint, all kinds of contempt and injury. On a certain occasion a woman heaped all sorts of bad language on Margaret, to the great scandal of the neighbourhood, but she never tried to defend herself, but rather rejoiced to hear herself defamed, and treated her assailant to the best her house could afford. If self-love, unjustly wounded, raised its head, our dress-maker at once crushed it down, and never allowed herself one word of excuse or the slightest expression of impatience. Such authority had she acquired over her passions by force of mortification.

VI.

And despite this blameless conduct she allowed no day to pass without approaching the tribunal of penance to confess with many tears her slightest neglect or imperfections. Some people not much given to frequenting the sacraments would say, as the lazy and lukewarm say now: "What could she confess when going so often to the tribunal of mercy?" The ardent longing to please God gives to the fervent light to discover defects which others do not notice. Besides, guided by faith which teaches that the sacraments of the dead may serve to increase the grace of the living, they seek in the frequent confession of their past sins to make their pardon more and more secure, and to light the flame of charity in their souls. With this purity of heart, and with frequent acts of faith, hope, and love, she prepared her soul to approach the Eucharistic table and to eat the Bread of Angels with indescribable consolation and support to bear with her cross. From this sacred banquet she derived her strength and courage to trample on the

world and give herself entirely to the service of God. And though from the intense divine love which burned in her breast, she could have desired to receive her beloved Jesus at all hours, she yet sometimes hesitated to go to Communion, because she looked on herself as unworthy to entertain in her heart the Lord of infinite majesty and grandeur. This struggle between her humility and her hunger for the Divine Manna so pressed her as sometimes to make her burst into copious tears. Jesus one day consoled her, and animated her to confidently approach the heavenly banquet, saying: "Fear not, my daughter; do not keep away from my table. Great indeed is the purity required for this Divine Sacrament; but if you are free from grievous sin, what makes you hesitate? The physician is not for those who are well but for those who are sick." And in reality in this angelic banquet the ailing find medicine, the sad consolation, the weak strength, the cowardly courage, the ignorant a Teacher, children their Father, the sheep their Pastor, subjects their King, and the poor the Lord of the universe and the Source of all good. Nevertheless, in order that she might receive the immense graces which the good Jesus showers over well-disposed souls, He exhorted her to prepare herself to receive His sacred body, not only purified from grievous sin, but free also from light faults, and recommended to her—recollection, silence, and the avoidance of everything that might displease His divine eyes. Comforted by this heavenly advice she now no longer withdrew from receiving Jesus through a consideration of her unworthiness: but on the contrary, her very unworthiness stimulated her to run to the Fountain of all true greatness, whilst labouring to prepare in her soul a decent reception for her mighty Monarch.

VII.

Our Divine Saviour, who is ever generous and liberal

with the liberal and generous, poured out ineffable and sweetest consolations on His servant. In His close relations with the holy dressmaker, He sometimes lovingly complained of the insensibility, ingratitude, and want of correspondence on the part of sinners, infusing into the heart of His penitent an ardent zeal for the divine glory and the salvation of so many unfortunates as are blindly running headlong to their eternal ruin. The saint interceded for them, and offered to suffer for them all the torments of the world. "Daughter," the Lord often said to her, "look round the world. Do you not see how they repay my graces with new injuries, my love with indifference, my promises with contempt? The married give themselves up to nefarious vices, the single barter the gem of chastity for vile pleasures; and both single and married become the slaves of corrupting luxury, the source of a thousand frauds and shameful sins. If some are free from this impetuous torrent they become the slaves of vanity, and even look for praise for their very devotions and their reception of the sacraments. And look at people holding positions in society! Judges sell justice and oppress the innocent through bribery, recommendations, and wealth: ambitious people are not ashamed to burn the incense of flattery to those in power: in the merchants you find neither justice nor good faith; everything is adulterated everything is obtained by deceit and extortion. And there is no one to take pity on my widows, my orphans, and my poor, but all oppress them with deceit and usury! How could the graces of heaven fall on sinners so inhuman, for their very hardness and rebellion raise up an impediment to the Divine Mercy?"

Margaret, however, asked, prayed, insisted on the salvation of those poor wretches. She was greatly afflicted at sight of so many offences and such stubbornness, and she took revenge for them on her own body, as if she were the person guilty of such black ingratitude. In the midst of this pain and bitterness,

which are very severe to a soul that loves Jesus Christ, she had recourse for consolation to the Queen without spot and angels guardian, for whom she professed a special devotion ; and the Blessed Virgin as well as the heavenly spirits were ever ready to attend to her prayers, and often come to animate her by their visits and familiar conversation. And beyond these extraordinary graces, our Lord gave to this new Magdalen the gift of working miracles ; but she was a person of such profound humility, and was so anxious to be looked down on, that some stratagem was needed to make her impose hands on the sick, who often became healed under her touch. But she never hesitated if it were a work of mercy, so that no miraculous effect were expected from her ; on the contrary, she would go at once to a case of necessity, and sacrifice her own comfort and rest for the good of her neighbour.

VIII.

Three and twenty years had Margaret spent in these exercises of mortification, charity, religion, and every kind of good works, when the Lord was pleased to tell her her end was near, and that the souls freed from the pains of purgatory by her prayers and penances would come to meet her. And, indeed, the saintly dressmaker did interest herself in behalf of those holy souls by offering her satisfactory works for them. Praying once for three dead persons who had not given very good signs of predestination, she heard from the lips of Jesus that their souls were not in hell, as some rashly judged, but suffered so atrocious torments that were it not for the favourable sentence they received and the visits of the angels, they might almost doubt of their eternal salvation. Such are the sufferings of those dark cells ! After giving her this good news, the Lord again complained to her of the ingratitude of men, whose wickedness, as it were, obliged Him to discharge against peoples the

scourge of great public calamities. And yet peoples will not learn!

Margaret, now extenuated by her rigours, and consumed by the flame of charity, was warned of her happy end, and though she had such clear signs of her predestination, not therefore did she neglect to prepare for that terrible moment the best way she could. She received, with inexplicable fervour, the Holy Viaticum, and during seventeen days took no food, supported only by heavenly consolations, which inundated her soul with joy at the near approach of her end, of that hour when she should go to enjoy for ever her beloved Jesus. During all this time there escaped from her lips only tender conversations with her Divine Spouse, and ardent ejaculations, which were like sparks from the fire which consumed her heart. On the twenty-second of February, 1297, clinging to a crucifix, with her lips on the wound in the side, she delivered up her soul to the King of glory. She was then forty-eight years of age, of which she had passed twenty-four as a penitent. It is said that her son died later, a fervent religious of the Order of St. Francis. At the very hour the saint expired, a great servant of God saw her soul go up to the land of the just, escorted by a numerous band, who, in honour of her triumph, had escaped from purgatory. Her body, flexible and more beautiful than in life, emitted a sweet odour which filled the apartment. Thus did our Lord honour that instrument of so many penances!

As soon as the news of the glorious death of Margaret was known in the city, an immense multitude of all classes and ranks hastened to venerate the remains of the poor dressmaker, in testimony of the high opinion they had formed of her virtue. The number was so great that guards had to be placed round the bier to prevent pious thefts. Dressed in a costly red tunic, the corpse was carried in procession through the principal streets of the city, and laid in a new grave in the church of St. Basil. The funeral, or rather the triumphal accompani-

ment, was composed of the whole secular and regular clergy and the most select of the inhabitants. And later a sumptuous chapel was erected to her in the same church. Leo X. having been informed of the great miracles wrought through the intercession of the saint, and having seen with his own eyes the sacred body preserved incorrupt, as it is still preserved after six centuries, approved of the devotion paid to her, and permitted the town of Cortona to celebrate her feast. Urban VIII. extended this permission to the whole Order of St. Francis, and in 1624 expedited the solemn Bull of beatification. And finally Benedict XIII., after canonising the glorious dressmaker, ordered her feast to be celebrated in the universal Church the day after her happy decease. Her incorrupted body is preserved with great veneration in the church of the Franciscan fathers, which took the name of St. Margaret instead of St Basil.

VENERABLE ELIZABETH POBAR, PEASANT AND HOUSEKEEPER.

I.

IN the district of Calatayud, one of the most populous villages is Villarroya, famous for its holy house and hospital of Our Lady of the Mountain, about a league distant. In this village was born Elizabeth Pobar, on Wednesday in Holy Week, 7th of April, 1610. Her parents were John Pobar and Elizabeth Maestro, the latter a native of the village of Valtorres, the former of Villarroya, and both of good Christian families. One and the other, persuaded that the good education of children is the germ of their felicity and the key to a good life, took every care to rear her in a Christian manner. But her mother, who was always nearer her took special pains in this work, and missed no opportunity of infusing into her a love of virtue and a

profound devotion to the Blessed Virgin. And so one of the first words the child learned to lip was the sweet name of Mary. "O holy Virgin!" she used to exclaim with her innocent lips, "Virgin Mary, permit me not to fall into or die in mortal sin!"—an ejaculation which, though learned before she could know its importance, remained indelibly impressed on her heart, and at all hours spontaneously burst from her lips, to the ineffable consolation of her soul. In those years her childish work and amusement was to gather pictures of the saints and build little altars, when not performing slight duties suitable to her sex. With such training she grew up in wonderful candour, which became the characteristic of her life. She was incapable of judging ill of anyone, and when she heard of any public scandal she could not believe that any creature could be capable of offending a Lord worthy of being infinitely loved. Elizabeth was advancing in virtue in proportion to her years, and when she was now a big girl she was still remarkable for her child-like simplicity. When favoured some times with extraordinary attentions from heaven she thought that such graces were gifts of God, which all equally received. In this simplicity did she live before God and man; and her conversation was always about edifying matters, in which she ever displayed clear and bright talent, though as regards other subject she was often at a loss for words.

At the age of twelve she was miraculously cured by St. Ignatius of Loyola, for whom she had great devotion all her life. She had a cancerous sore on one of her feet, which grew so bad that it resisted all remedies, and her leg became partially paralysed. The doctors decided that it must be cut off, and Elizabeth's parents, much against their will, had become resigned to it. A celebrated surgeon had been already summoned to perform the operation, when the child happened to hear some pious women talk of the wonders wrought before an image of St. Ignatius, venerated in the parish church

of Munebrega. On this there awoke in the girl a great confidence in the power of the saint, and she asked her mother to take her to implore his aid before her leg should be amputated. Her parents consented, and, preparing for the journey as best they could, they went to Munebrega to offer a novena in the saint's honour. They left her with her aunt in Valtorres, who promised to daily place her before the sacred image. On the sixth day of the novena such an extraordinary desire of sleep seized her in the saint's chapel that she had to yield to it for some time. A priest awoke her and scolded her for her want of reverence. Elizabeth got up, and, feeling herself quite well, exclaimed: "St. Ignatius has cured me! St. Ignatius has cured me!" And indeed she who a little before was unable to walk without support, now threw her crutches away and ran about full of joy. This miracle increased devotion to the saint, particularly among the girl's relatives, who ever afterwards had recourse to him in all their difficulties. Her mother had a proof of his favour in that most terrible hour, the agony of death. Our devout servant of God was attending her in those supreme moments, and when alone with her, besought the saint's aid for her. There was in the room an image of the holy patriarch, and in Elizabeth's eyes it appeared to grow into the form of a venerable old man, and it came down from its place to keep guard over the bed of the dying woman. The poor girl was alarmed at this, and, full of holy dread, covered up her face. When she again looked up her mother was dead, and the picture of the saint restored to its place.

II.

The motherless girl continued to live in her simplicity and conformity to the will of God in the midst of her tribulations, when her father determined to marry her

to a farmer of Valtorres. Ever submissive and obedient in everything not opposed to the will of God, though only thirteen years of age, she was married to John Herrer, a man of advanced years. This, circumstance and the depraved disposition of her husband, afforded Elizabeth many opportunities of meriting; but she, always sweet, amiable, and patient, suffered all in silence and tried to disarm him. But jealousy was now added to John's bad temper, and this filled up the cup of bitterness with which he withered the heart of his innocent and pure spouse. Great was the affliction which filled her soul when she found herself treated not only as a slave, but even as a faithless wife; and she would probably have been driven to some desperate act if not restrained by the holy fear of God and the good counsels of the Vicar of Villarroya, where she went to live after she was married. She was also encouraged to suffer for the love of God by two virtuous female friends, Augustina Sevilla and Eugenie Soria, who were also under the same priest's direction. After doing her usual work, in her devotions she gave the first place to prayer and works of mercy. She daily joined these companions to make the stations of the cross, and through this, accompanied by meditation on the passion and death of Jesus Christ, the three reached a high degree of perfection. With the consent of her confessor, Elizabeth at this time performed many works of penance and mortification. Her fasting was at once voluntary and compulsory; for her poverty was so great that she was often in need of the necessaries of life, and this perhaps in a measure softened the hard-heartedness of her husband. One of her favourite occupations was attendance on the sick.

When there were no sick to attend or console in Villarroya, and her domestic duties did not require her presence, with her husband's permission she was accustomed to seek them elsewhere, from which she derived great courage and fruit, because she did it

for God's sake. In her burning charity she would like to be in charge of all the sick. And when she could not, through some impediment, attend them personally, she used to offer prayers and penances for them, through which the Lord sometimes bestowed wonderful favours on them. All this, however, was regulated by obedience, without which she did nothing, for she never allowed herself to be ruled by the whims of devotion or the impulses of her fervour. And yet in this blind obedience to the direction of her confessors and in her pious exercises, she never neglected the obligations of her state, which always held the first place in her heart. She constantly served her husband with the tenderness of a loving spouse and the humility of a slave, which was the more meritorious, inasmuch as it came from her invincible patience in bearing with his harshness of disposition. And so much did she effect by her good example, so much did she labour with sensible counsel, and storm heaven with incessant prayer, that he became an admirer and imitator of her heroic virtues. She was most diligent in the education of her children; and even in this life God rewarded her by permitting her to see, in the three that remained to her, the realisation of her care and aspirations.

The servant of God having heard of the great miracles wrought before the holy image of Christ in Calatoras, a village in the kingdom of Aragon, conceived a longing desire to visit and reverence it. With humble persistence, she made her mind known to her husband, but he again and again refused her permission to make the pilgrimage. Then she had recourse to her constant protector, St. Ignatius, who appeared to her, consoled and carried her supernaturally to Calatoras. Here she found herself with her lips to the side of Jesus Christ's image, and they were tinged with miraculous blood, which flowed from the wound. This favour lasted half an hour: no one knows what she saw, but she was heard to say:—"Oh! what blood the sins of the world

make our Lord shed!" After this extraordinary grace the saint restored her to her home in Villarroya.

III.

Here she continued the devout exercise of the *Via Crucis*, in which the Lord favoured her with ineffable consolation. Once her Divine Spouse appeared to her and rebuked her because she did not add the crown of thorns to the heavy cross she was bearing. On another occasion He rewarded the docility with which she corresponded to his inspirations, by making the dry crown with which she afterwards punished herself, bloom afresh. One day, while engaged in the same pious practice she asked the Lord to free her from certain troubles, when suddenly the oratory where she was, became illuminated, and she saw Jesus with the cross on his shoulders, who said to her: "I carried the cross for your sins and the sins of the whole world, and do you wish to be relieved of yours?" This vision passed rapidly like a shadow but left Elizabeth consoled and ready to suffer for Jesus Christ.

In the picturesque hills which run through the district of Villarroya, and afford the traveller beautiful and varied scenery, is situated the hermitage of St. Mary of the Mountain. Elizabeth used to go to it every day her domestic duties allowed her, and in this assent she satisfied at once her devotion and her desire for mortification. The ground is broken and covered with thorns and briars. The servant of God, weaving chaplets to the Queen of heaven with her beads, walked barefooted over that rough carpet, often leaving marks of blood behind her and receiving from the Blessed Virgin the graces and favours of a tender Mother. Everything in this world has an end.

After a little, whether from the poverty of the family, or that husband and wife had resolved to imitate the chastity of St. Joseph and Mary, or some other cause unknown to us, Elizabeth went to Calatayud with John

Herrer's consent, to keep house for a gentleman of that town, called Mr. Martin Zapata, and had to give up this devotion so pleasing to her. One of the first resolutions she formed on entering this house was to fulfil with religious exactness the duties of housekeeper. Economy in the expenses, order and cleanliness in the furniture and house, the satisfaction of her master in everything not displeasing to God, were the objects to which her constant care should extend, to the Lord's greater glory, in that new employment; and she fulfilled all in the most satisfactory way. Her husband sometimes visited her with great affection and veneration, but both looked on themselves as brother and sister, and faithful imitators of the parents of Jesus. Nearly twenty years was this faithful servant of God in this gentleman's employment, two in Huesca, and the rest in Calatayud, and during that time she made marked progress in virtue, now with prayer and fasting, now with works of mercy, now by punctual performance of her duties. Soon it was reported in Calatayud that Mr. Zapata had a saint in his house; and this was enough to make many anxious to know her. But as Elizabeth conducted herself with the candour and simplicity of a child, the fame of her sanctity became to several a subject for laughter and pastime. Someone told her this, and she answered: "Don't mind, for I will ask our Lord to stop their mockery if it is injurious to their souls." The fruits of this prayer were soon visible, for the very person who had indulged most in the jokes repented of his fault and never again opened his lips but in praise of her. And this change was brought about in him from seeing her face bathed in celestial splendour one day he was going to say something funny to her, and his heart was touched with regret and with veneration for the servant of God.

In Huesca Elizabeth pursued her virtuous exercises with increasing fervour. She was assisted very much by an experienced and zealous confessor, whom she

found in the College of the Society of Jesus, a confessor to whom she had already revealed the secrets of her soul during her stay in Calatayud. He took such an interest in the spiritual advancement of his penitent that, though he was one of the last, Elizabeth always venerated him as the principal father of her soul. He made her undertake several works of self-negation and mortification; and she complied with all with such promptness and such marks of the low conception she had formed of herself, that she infused devotion into all who witnessed her heroic example. This high character made many watch her with marked interest, and some declared that they had often noticed evident signs of the extraordinary favours which the Lord granted her in prayer. In Huesca she cured a child that had been given up by all the doctors who saw her, and she foretold the death of her mistress a year before it happened. This event obliged her to seek another asylum; but though now in reduced circumstances, Providence did not desert her, but moved the hearts of many charitable people to attend to her wants. A severe illness, however, obliged her to take up her residence in Saragossa to complete her recovery. Thence, at the request of the Marquis and Marchioness of Coscojuela, to whom one of her sons was chaplain, she returned to Huesca, and remained there two years more.

IV.

It was the Lord's will she should reside in Saragossa, at the feet of our dear Lady of the Pillar, and thither she returned, to the great consolation of her soul. She lived in the house of a person of distinction, and was surrounded with plenty, but she missed being near the College of Jesuits, that she might be directed by one of its members to whose care she owed her advancement in virtue. Trusting, then, in the protection of St. Ignatius, and in the aid of her confessor, who was the

then rector of the college, she took courage to seek a poor lodging near it, in which she might pass the rest of her days as a beggar, but free from worldly cares. Aided by some pious persons, above all by her son, then chaplain of the Private del Huerto, she took up her residence as she had resolved, and never wanted her daily bread. She spent whole days in the church of the Society praying for sinners, and for the prisoners in the public jail. Daily she awoke between two and three in the morning, and remained in prayer till dawn, when she went to hear Mass, to confess and receive communion. In the evening she visited the sick, and, with the beads in her hand, though bent down by the weight of years, went round some churches, among which, it is needless to say, was that of her patron, St. Ignatius. If no other occupations in which God's glory might be more promoted prevented it, this was the daily distribution of her time. She reserved the holy exercise of the cross for between five and six in the evening. This terminated her day, and at night she looked to the relief of her wearied body. And certainly she should be tired, for at her advanced age she performed the *Via Crucis* on her knees, carrying a cross weighing thirty-three pounds, with a rope round her neck, a crown of thorns on her head, and two heavy iron chains on her feet. This was her favourite exercise, this the innocent tenor of her life, enriched with immense treasures of grace and ineffable celestial gifts, in which a happy death found her, opening to her the gates of eternal life, where, we hope, she enjoys the reward due to her great labours. She died in the year 1679.

Her body looked so pleasing after death that it excited respect and devotion. As soon as the news of her demise spread the house was filled with people, and all wanted to get some relic of her poor habitation, as a memorial of the blessed defunct. To please the crowds who went to see her, they left her exposed the whole day to public veneration in her own house, and on the

following day, after the ceremonies of the Church, celebrated before an immense congregation, amid the tears of the good, and the praises and admiration of all, she was buried in the chapel of St. Ignatius, at whose feet she awaits a glorious resurrection, to the confusion of the proud ones of the world.



VENERABLE MARYANNE VILLALBA,
LACE-MAKER.

I.

THIS venerable servant of God was born in Paracuellos de la Rivera, a little village near Calatayud, in Aragon, on the 20th of April, 1565. Her parents were John Villalba and Eliza Vicente, of families, though not poor, more distinguished by their honesty and Christianity than their fortune. Eliza reared her with great care and gave her good example, which is the best teacher, studying not only that she should not lose the candour of innocence among other boys and girls, but should be adorned with every kind of Christian virtues. The docility and good disposition of the girl, who was ever obedient to her mother's wishes, contributed not a little to her proper education. Even at the tender age of four years she showed a special inclination to pious exercises, and a filial devotion to the Queen of Angels. With such a foundation it is needless to say that Maryanne never caused her humble parents a single pain, and they, in their daughter's good disposition, gathered the fruits of their care.

When she reached the fitting age she contracted marriage with a native of Paracuellos, whose name we do not know. Though this union lasted only about a year, Maryanne had sufficient opportunity in it of tasting the fruit of her Christian patience. Her husband's passionate and rash disposition often reduced her to sad

straits ; but the wife, by silently bearing injuries, and availing herself of fitting opportunities to disarm her consort, obtained by suavity and sweetness what she never would have attained by bitterness. After remaining a widow for some time she again married, either to attend better to her wants or at the advice of her relatives. Second and subsequent marriages, though never reprobated by the Catholic Church, have never been lauded, because they suppose little love for continence, which the Holy Fathers have ever held in such high estimation. Hence the sacred canons prohibited priesthood and the office of deaconess to be conferred on those who had been widowed a second time. But this does not suppose that those who contracted marriage more than once for holy and laudable ends may not obtain a high degree of perfection ; and of this number was our Maryanne, who was now wedded to Gaspar Escobar, a native of Toledo, and a lace-maker by trade.

These spouses lived some years without having issue, so that the venerable wife, freed from domestic cares, had nothing to prevent her from dedicating herself to the practices of piety, which formed her delight. It was not so, however, until after a pilgrimage they made to Our Lady of the Sierra of Villaroya, when they obtained the fruit of benediction so much desired by the lace-maker. The Queen of Heaven blessed them with thirteen children, of whom three daughters and one son embraced the religious state, the latter in the convent of St. Francis de Paul, and the two former in the house of the Carmelites of Saragossa. Surrounded by so many children, and dedicated to their Christian education, she had often to sacrifice her devotion to her domestic duties, which she did without hesitation, knowing that the God of Mercy is content with the will when acts are impossible. Yet she endeavoured in her occupations to ever seek God with pure intention, and so neither the work of her house and kitchen, nor the spinning of thread in her trade, prevented her from

living united to God and performing her ordinary exercises of piety.

But her husband did not look on it in the same way; for, though not a bad man, he did not esteem such practices as highly as his wife. Hence, when Maryanne was a little later than usual in returning from Mass, or remained in the church to go to confession and communion, she was received by Gaspar, if not with a scold, at least with a frown. One day, half angry, he said: "What is the use of praying so much and going to communion so often, and wasting so much time?" To which his fervent wife answered: "I pray God, brother, the Lord may let you taste spiritual things." And she was not content with simple desires, but in her familiar intercourse, on every opportunity that offered, she tried to bring her husband to a more fervent life. And such was the efficacy of her prayers, such the prudence and good sense of her talk, such the zeal with which she laboured, that in the end she saw her wishes realised. And, indeed, Gaspar began to lead so recollected and fervent a life, that soon, full of holy consolation at the favours the Lord communicated to him in prayer, he would say to his wife and instructress: "Sister, now I don't wonder at long hours being passed with the great God, when His Majesty really sheds the rays of His light on the soul, and expels darkness from it. Let us love the Lord very much, for His immense goodness deserves it." Maryanne, or rather the divine love by means of Maryanne, had conquered the lace-maker's heart, as formerly did Paulina that of her spouse, Pamachus. From the total delivery of himself up to Jesus in all his undertakings and occupations he felt his soul disengaged from the goods of earth, and ~~ambitioned~~ nothing but the treasures of heaven, as well for himself as for his children. With their house regulated on such sound principles, they encouraged each other on the path of virtue, mutually assisted each other by prayer and holy conversation, and formed a family of the just,

a family Christianly happy, for in it reigned one sole will, the love of virtue. Thus passed some years, the soul of their holy enterprises being Maryanne, followed by her husband, who was distinguished by his tender love for the Holy Sacrament.

II.

Few are the saints and pious people who were not remarkable for their devotion, respect, and reverence for the sacred mystery of the Eucharist, and for the desire to receive into their breast this bountiful Guest, and keep him company when lying a prisoner for love of us in the tabernacle of the altar. For as the stomach's heat enkindles the appetite, and creates a longing for material food, so also the great love of God, when it takes possession of the heart, excites a hunger and desire to eat this Bread of Life, or at least to contemplate it with the eyes of faith placed on the Eucharistic table, and to be spiritually united more closely to Jesus Christ. And so He appears to have wished to remain in this august Sacrament to relieve the fatigues of love, and to satisfy the longing of His elect. And if, as it is said, hunger is the best sauce, what must be the sweetness experienced by the just, who, urged by this heavenly hunger, approach the sacred table to eat the Bread of Angels, this Sovereign Manna, in which are centred all delights! What the peace of those who visit with intense love this Divine Sacrament, the memorial and pledge of the immense charity of Jesus, in which, according to the sacred Council of Trent, God poured out the inestimable riches of His divine love.

Animated by these sentiments, Gaspar bewailed his past blindness, not because he had lived in sin, which he always abhorred, but because he had not appreciated as they deserve, the celestial treasures contained in the Holy Eucharist. It appeared to him madness to live months without receiving Jesus, and to leave Him alone without paying Him a visit at least once a day. This

hunger gave him strength to bear with edifying resignation the excessive pains with which the Lord willed to purify him in this life. He suffered painful attacks which the good Jesus sent him, and which he bore with Christian patience till he died on the 5th of July, 1620.

When Maryanne, who had attended her husband with the love and solitude of a mother, found herself free from the conjugal yoke, she thought of nothing but uniting herself more closely to God, and reaching the pinnacle of Christian perfection. One of the principal means of which she availed herself was to receive with greater recollection and preparation the holy sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, which she had always frequented with a holy anxiety and no little advantage. Another of the fruitful sources from which, after Communion and the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, she derived greater incentives to virtue, and strength to resist temptations, was the holy exercise of the *Via Crucis*. Pope Clement XII., in his instructions issued for the proper performance of this devotion, says that, when practised with proper piety and fervour it slowly infuses into the souls of the faithful, of whatever condition in life, the pious habit of meditation, and a perfect reformation of morals. Maryanne never went through it without some spiritual profit, and by its means reached a high degree of contemplation, in which the Lord bestowed on her singular favours. She added to these foundations of solid virtue a great and tender devotion to the Queen of Angels, and a mortification manifested by extraordinary penances, disciplines, the suffering of pain, persecution, calumny, and other things with which her beloved Jesus tried the heroic patience of his servant. After saying all this, it is needless to add that she always repaid with kindness the greatest offences and humiliations, that she burned with zeal for the extension of the divine glory, and that, according to her condition, she laboured with insatiable thirst for the good of souls. Animated by this good spirit, she

not only endeavoured with discretion and humility to set all who approached her on fire with divine love, but even went in search of lost souls to rescue them from the jaws of hell. And, despite all the dangers of vanity with which the enemy persecuted her, she managed to preserve a profound humility and an immaculate purity. We will quote only one instance in proof of this.

III.

When she was one day in the church at her prayers, a man came and tempted her to sin; but Maryanne answered with holy zeal: "Are you not ashamed to speak of such foul things in the presence of your God?" and told him to be off about his business. She believed it was the devil himself appeared to her on this occasion. Her love of holy purity made her desire to cultivate the acquaintance of pure religious souls, and to fly from the dissolute. She knew the latter by an impure, unwholesome smell they emitted, and availed herself of this to try to bring them to a better course of life; and over the former she often saw resplendent angels, who sang the divine praises. And, in fact, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, chastity in a certain sense transforms men into angels, and hence it is called the angelic virtue.

In humility she passed all limits. She had learned from St. Teresa that the foundation-stones of perfection must be laid very deep, on account of the weight of virtue; and hence she sought every means of smothering vanity, and making herself despised by all. She had great devotion to St. Teresa, and to St. Gertrude the Great, and loved to hear their books read, particularly those of the former. But she did not wish for their extraordinary gifts, as St. Francis of Sales tells us of another woman, who tried to talk and act like St. Teresa, and came to imagine that she was like her, even in her visions and revelations. So far do vanity and pride reach! Maryanne did not allow this monster to enter

her heart; but, though favoured herself with extraordinary graces of God, sought in the saint's books nothing but humility, and self-negation.

Her patience, as the offspring of humility, was equally edifying. In her last illness but one, a nun sent her an *Agnus Dei* by a priest, and other relics to console her. She took them, and, after praying over them, returned them to the priest, saying that the nun did not care much for her when she wished to restore her to health so soon, and not give her an opportunity of meriting. When the priest asked her what she meant, she answered that St. Teresa had cured her. Though freed from her sufferings against her will, she did not fail to acknowledge God's favour in her cure, for which she gave the Lord and the saint her grateful thanks.

IV.

She endeavoured to lay up treasures of eternal life for herself when the Lord should be pleased to call her from this exile. And, if she were always solicitous to not lose a single point of perfection, she was much more so when God revealed to her her proximate end.

To purify his servant more and more, the Lord visited her with a complication of painful diseases. In these sufferings she appeared like another Job in her Christian resignation. One of her principal consolations in the martyrdom she endured was the recollection of her three children who had joined religious orders, and the good conduct of the rest. After receiving the holy sacraments with the fervour we may suppose, her daughter Margaret, who was in novitiate, send word to her by a married sister that she wanted her when in heaven to ask Our Lady to be a mother to her in her place. The dying woman heard this message with singular consolation, and, turning to an image of Mary at her bedside, prayed for some time, and then said: "Tell Margaret I will do what she asks, and the Virgin will take her as a daughter."

A little after, her confessor, Father John Perez, arrived, and, knowing that her end was near, said to her: "It is time now, my daughter, to go to heaven." "Yes, father," she replied, "it is time to go." When she was in her last agony, her daughter, Emerenciana, fearing she would not be able to bear up, wished to leave the room; but her mother with edifying serenity detained her, saying: "Don't go, child; all will soon be over." Soon after, about mid-day, turning to the image of the Blessed Virgin, she said with great fervour: "Holy Virgin, it is time now: it is time now, Mother mine." Then she made the sign of the cross, saying: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," and delivered up her spirit to her Creator, on the 4th of December, 1623. She was interred with great solemnity in the church of St. Francis de Paul, whose tertian she had been. In the annals of this Order are recorded various miracles and apparitions which happened after death in honour of Maryanne, who, in the humble trade of lace-maker, had attained so high a degree of sanctity.



BLESSED PETER OF SIENNA, COMB-MAKER.

I.

PETER was a native of Sienna, where, through his profound humility and heroic virtues, he merited the public estimation of his fellow-citizens, and copious benedictions from heaven. Well grounded in the Christian maxims, he pitied the sad fall of various youths of his own age, who were blinded by the false lustre of pleasures, and became convinced that a young man whom God does not call to perpetual chastity should seek a safe asylum in holy matrimony as soon as Providence affords him the opportunity. He consequently looked out for a girl of his own position, and similar sentiments, whose Christian conduct might be a sure pledge of the peace and harmony in which he hoped

to live with his future spouse. The Lord, who never closes His ears to the prayers of the humble, granted our youth the grace he asked for. He was married to a virtuous girl, and lived in such union and concord with her, that they might be proposed as a model to Christian spouses. Religion makes the man the head of the house, and the woman the angel of the domestic hearth. Peter and his wife, though strictly keeping the place which God had assigned them, appeared to have the same heart, the same affections, and the same aspirations. Peter, ever at peace with himself and with God, succeeded in communicating it to his wife also, sweetening the bitterness she sometimes had to suffer from the world, and lightening her cross. And his docile and affectionate companion studied to please him and comfort him, for she knew that in this she was fulfilling God's holy will. There are never wanting ill-minded people who can never live at peace, either with themselves or others, and who introduce, perhaps without thinking of it, discord into Christian families; but Peter and his wife closed their ears to idle talk, and continued to live united as God commands. If they noticed any fault or defect, their charity covered it with a close veil, or sweetly corrected it. This charity, which made them mutually overlook their faults, obliged them also to give each other proofs of affection, and daily draw closer the bonds which united their hearts to Jesus.

Peter earned his livelihood by making combs, a trade which he followed from youth to old age. In imitation of Jesus and Joseph, when his hands were engaged at his work he kept his heart united to God, and offered Him the sweet aroma of prayer. Content with the necessaries of life, he never tried to rise above his humble position, nor gave entrance into his breast to that thirst of gold and vanities which buries many opulent families in misfortune; on the contrary, trusting in Divine Providence, he generously divided his little savings with the poor, and avoided those vain amusements in which

many lose their time and their true felicity. And, indeed, how many give way to their passions, and only find unhappiness where they thought to have met with pleasure! Wanting in that lively faith which embellishes prosperous as well as adverse fortune with the splendour of that divine sun which vivifies and governs all; deprived of hope, which transforms our very misfortunes into springs of sweetness and consolation; devoid of charity, which places our imperishable felicity in the cross, they see nothing around them but objects which fill them with weariness and disgust. They run after diversions, after joy and pleasure, which only increase their hunger, and enlarge the vacuum in their hearts. The world sometimes thinks them very happy, but they hear in the depths of their souls a voice which tells them they are deceived, and calls them to felicity—a felicity whose echoes sound at a great distance from them. Disgusted with a life of pleasure, they go in search of riches, and riches answer that not in them lies felicity. They try everything: they seek after honour and mundane glory, and the vacuum of the heart still increases, and when they think they have happiness in their hand, they become convinced that they had been pursuing a phantom. What a contrast there is between worldlings and those who follow Jesus in earnest, by fulfilling all the duties of a Christian! Our comb-maker discovered the source of true happiness in the smoke of the horns, and in the ivory wrought by his hands. He who has least wants is the most happy.

II.

Our saint had no other desire than to comply with the Divine Will, and this he could satisfy without counting on man for assistance. To victoriously trample on human respect, he laid aside his ordinary dress, and put on the livery of penance by enlisting in the third secular

Order of St. Francis. He was from his recollection, piety, and contempt of all things earthly, a perfect model for his fellow-members. Having lost his spouse a short time after he joined the congregation, he sold all he possessed, and after distributing the proceeds among the indigent, gave himself up entirely to the practice of Christian perfection. On Sundays, festival days, and at other spare times, he visited the celebrated hospital of Sienna called St. Mary of the Stairs, and there at the bedside of the sick, like a good Samaritan, he poured on the wounds of their hearts the balsam of consolation, cheered them with the fruits of his labour, and encouraged them to suffer the pains of this life with resignation.

But the exercise from which he derived torrents of wisdom was that of prayer, in which he spent the greater part of the day and night before the Blessed Sacrament, sometimes in St. Dominick's church, and at others in that of Our Lady, which was the principal one of the town. The illuminations he received in this close intercourse with God were very great. The Lord showed him in them the high degree of glory which St. Francis gained by following closely in the footsteps of the Redeemer. His fervent devotion to this holy patriarch, which induced him to put on his habit, enkindled in him also a lively desire to live among his children. At last, after many prayers and entreaties, he succeeded in being received as a guest, and as such he passed the rest of his life among the Friars Minor of Sienna, enjoying all the consolations which the Lord reserves for pure souls who valiantly resist the attacks of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Meditation on the divine truths had so inflamed the heart of this poor artisan with the fire of charity, that it sometimes appeared exteriorly, and surrounded him with an aureola of light. This prodigy, witnessed by many, acquired for him the fame of virtue and sanctity; but praise and public estimation weakened not his deep humility. He knew that men's judgments are fallible, and that neither their

blame nor their praise can change one from what he is in the eyes of infinite wisdom. So, never losing sight of his own worthlessness and nothingness, and attributing all the virtue he had to the source of all good, far from being elated by praise, he appeared to cast deeper roots in humility, ever seeking contempt and the lowering of himself. He held silence in great estimation as a powerful means of avoiding dissipation. The servant of God observed it with great exactness: he abhorred vain and idle conversations, and carefully avoided superfluous words. When he went out to dispose of his combs, shoehorns, and other articles, and met with a purchaser he told him precisely the price, without praising his wares. If the buyer tried to pull him down in the price the comb-maker listened patiently; and if he had to make an answer he did so with sweetness, without taking offence at the other's importunity, who sometimes made him upset all his goods without purchasing anything.

Dreading the loss of his purity of soul and body, he avoided every danger; and to have his passions under complete control he kept them in subjection by mortification. His fasts were rigorous and almost continual, his sleep short, his prayers long, and his pilgrimages frequent and painful. The sorrow with which he bewailed and prayed God's mercy on his slightest faults was extraordinary. One day he wrote down all the defects of his youth, that he might have them ever before his eyes, and wash them out with new tears of repentance. Having gone to a place near Sienna called St. Francis' tree, he went over them one by one in great bitterness of heart; and as he was shedding copious tears over them, which the love of God drew from him, an angel's voice told him his sins were completely pardoned. On this the humble comb-maker was encouraged, not to slacken in his fervour, but to increase his penances in order to lay up in heaven stores of riches which perish not, and of which sin alone can rob us, till we make our peace with an offended God.

III.

The constant and heroic examples of virtue which he gave, though in the eyes of the slaves of the world only humbug and hypocrisy, gained for him as a rule among decent people veneration and esteem, which the Lord encouraged by extraordinary graces.

Besides the splendours which sometimes miraculously surrounded him, as we have said, He gave him the gift of penetrating hearts, and the grace of curing the sick. He brought a child to life, and freed the father from a violent disorder. He cured Malfei, a citizen of Sienna, of acute pains in the head by simply making the sign of the cross on him. He dictated and wrote, though unlettered, most salutary advices, which prove how full he was of the science of the saints. In fine, our poor comb-maker, rich in celestial gifts, gained the appreciation and regard, not only of the highest and most illustrious people of the town, such as Blessed Ambrose of Sienna, who gloried in his friendship, and faithfully followed his counsel, but of the magistrates themselves, who consulted him in difficult and complicated public business, wondering ever at his superhuman wisdom. At last, full of deserts, he fell grievously ill; and having received the holy sacraments with seraphic fervour, he exchanged this mortal life for the eternal on the 4th of December, 1289. He was buried in the church of St. Francis, and the rulers of Sienna erected a magnificent mausoleum over him, and with the consent of the inhabitants decided to annually celebrate the memory of so illustrious a son. Pope Pius II. published the glory of the pious artisan in a sermon preached in Sienna, and Pius VII., in 1802, gave permission to the townspeople to annually celebrate the feast of the glorious comb-maker.

Reading from the History of the Holy Family.

FROM THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE TO HIS BAPTISM.

IT was ordained in the ancient law that a woman who should conceive in the ordinary way and bear a son, should remain forty days in her house as unclean, and should then go to the temple to be purified, offering at the same time a lamb and a dove, and if poor a pair of doves or pigeons, and asking the priest to pray to God for her. There was another law which affected the first-born son. In recognition of the great favour received by the Hebrews, when the exterminating Angel slew all the first-born of the Egyptians, leaving those of the chosen people unharmed, it was ordained that all the first-born sons should be dedicated to the service of the altar, or after their presentation, should be redeemed with coin equivalent to about four shillings of our money.

It is clear that neither Jesus nor Mary was subject to these prescriptions; but in order to cure our disobedience by their humility, when the day of the Purification arrived, Joseph and Mary took the Infant God and, presenting Him in the temple, redeemed Him with the offering of the poor. At that time there lived in Jerusalem a venerable old man called Simeon, a just man, who feared God and was filled with the Holy Ghost, and was expecting the consolation of Israel. Some have

held that he was a priest of the Old Law and others have believed that he was a blind man who was cured the moment he took Jesus in his arms; but neither of these assertions has any strong foundation. The Scriptures only say that this fortunate man was told by God that he should not die till he had seen the promised Messiah. Inspired then and urged on by divine impulse, he went to the temple just as the parents of Jesus entered to offer the Child in fulfilment of the law. When Simeon saw Jesus he knew from heaven that the Child was the Christ, and taking Him in his arms he blessed God in these words: "Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace. Because my eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples. A light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel." Mary and Joseph paid attentive ear to the words of the saintly old man, who blessed them both, and turning specially to the Virgin, said to her with prophetic spirit: "Behold this *Child* is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." There also lived at this town a prophetess named Anna, now advanced in years, who, after seven years of married life, had been left a widow in the flower of her youth, and she was always occupied in the service of the Lord and of his temple, spending her days and nights in prayer and fasting. This virtuous old woman also arrived at the same time, and in her turn burst out in praises of the Lord, and said wonderful things of the Child to all who looked for the redemption of Israel. See how the Lord even in this world rewards the constancy of his faithful and loyal servants!

Mary and Joseph, having complied with the ordinances of the law, returned to Nazareth, which was situated in Galilee. In the meantime Herod was awaiting the return of the Magi; but finding his wicked expecta-

tions frustrated, and more and more confirmed in the belief of the birth of the Liberator of Israel, and the fear least he should be robbed of his kingdom daily increasing, he adopted the barbarous resolution of destroying Jesus by condemning to death all the children under two years in and about Bethlehem. The executioners were about carrying out this cruel order amid the tears and wailings of the poor mothers when the angel of the Lord spoke in dreams to the patriarch St. Joseph, and said to him: "Arise and take the Child and His Mother and fly into the land of Egypt; and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him." Quickly did the saint arise, for it was yet night, and taking those two beloved treasures with him, fled into Egypt to free them from the hands of the cruel tyrant. And now did the prophecy of Simeon begin to be fulfilled, and that holy family, the most innocent the world ever saw, was obliged to eat the bitter bread of exile, for our edification and example.

Several holy Fathers, supported by a long-established tradition, assure us that when these blessed pilgrims entered that idolatrous country the statues of the false gods trembled, and some fell in pieces to the ground. It also appears probable that for at least five years our holy Pilgrims had to endure the pains and privations of exile; but they were always submissive to the will of God, whose infinite providence never ceases to watch over those who serve Him with constancy and fidelity. According to another Eastern tradition the Holy Family resided in Hermopolis, between Heliopolis and Cairo, where is yet pointed out a fountain, held in great veneration because it is believed that the Virgin washed the clothes of the Child Jesus in it.

Herod died in a short time, full of rage and tortured by acutest pains, for he was devoured by maggots, in punishment of his impiety and pride, before death came to close his eyes and bury him in an abyss of eternal

torments and despair. After the death of this monster the angel of God again appeared in dreams to St. Joseph, and said to him: "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel. For they are dead who sought the life of the Child." St. Joseph at once prepared to execute the order of the celestial messenger; but hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither, and, warned in sleep, retired to Gallilee and dwelt in Nazareth, as had been announced by the prophets.

In the meantime the Child was growing in age and in proportion as His body was developed, the immense wisdom contained in his soul was exteriorly manifested. According to the custom of the Jews, the Holy Family annually visited Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Pasch. One time, when the Child was twelve years old, He went up with his parents to the Holy City to fulfil the prescriptions of the law in the temple of God. When the august ceremonies were over the multitude dispersed each to his own dwelling. St. Joseph and the Virgin took the road to Nazareth, but, being separated in the crowd, they did not remark that Jesus remained behind in the city; on the contrary, each thought that the Child God was with the other, or with some of their friends, and they had gone an entire day's journey before they missed Him.

Arriving at nightfall at the inn, they saw He was not there; they waited and waited for Him; but, finding He did not turn up, they began to seek Him among all their acquaintances. Vain search! The Lord wished to prove their invincible patience, and hence He subjected it to so bitter a trial. Finding, then, that all their efforts were useless, they turned back to Jerusalem, and continued their search for three whole days. Great must have been the grief of those parents for the loss of one they loved so much. But at last the Lord was satisfied with the heroic resignation of those afflicted

pilgrims, and liberated them from the bitterness they were tasting, by conducting them to the temple, where they found Him in the midst of the doctors, putting them questions and listening to their answers. The doctors were astonished at the observations which fell from the mouth of the Child. Mary and Joseph also wondered on witnessing a scene so remarkable; and the Mother, turning to Jesus, said to Him: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." To which the Child answered: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" Though none of the spectators understood these words, the Virgin treasured them in her heart, and meditated on the profound mysteries they contained. Full of content at finding Him, and blessing the divine mercies, they returned to Nazareth, where Jesus lived entirely subject to them till He was thirty years of age, and grew in grace and wisdom before God and men.

The evangelists tell us nothing of what our Lord did from His twelfth year till He commenced His public life; we only know that, though God and Man, He lived obedient to His parents, as well-reared, docile children should ever do. And so, according to St. Basil and other Fathers of the Church, He performed with patience and meekness, whatever corporal tasks the Virgin and St. Joseph marked out for Him; for, though the social position of the Holy Family was not that of beggars exactly, yet it was not such that they could exempt themselves from the labour required to procure the necessaries of life. It is true that Jesus, of his omnipotence, could have provided them by other means, and by His sole will filled their house with untold wealth; but He wished to show us by His example that man's true riches consist, not in the possession of earthly goods, but in the cultivation of virtue; and that labour, sanctified by the spirit of obedience, and taken as a penalty of the sins He came to redeem us from, far from lowering,

ennobles him, and opens up for him a mine of celestial treasures. He therefore preferred to the brilliancy and lustre of a noble position, in the eyes of the world, the privations of an humble trade, sharing in the toil of his putative father, and helping him to earn what was required for the support of the Family. He never went to school to learn letters; and this more because He was the son of struggling parents than because He was the uncreated Wisdom, supposing, as we must, that He wished to appear like other men.

Neither do we know for certain what trade He followed, but tradition assures us that He was a carpenter. At sight of this excellent Model, who will be ashamed of His profession, how lowly soever it may appear? Who will refuse to labour when he sees the Son of God incarnate handle the hatchet, work the saw, and grasp the plane? Who will regard any office as humiliating when he contemplates Him who came down from heaven to regenerate the world, engaged in manual toil? How happy would the majority of artisans be if they would only endeavour to imitate this good example! Neither avarice nor ambition ever found entrance into that happy cottage; and hence, contented in their mediocrity, they had not to kill themselves to earn the necessaries of life, particularly when we remember the abstemiousness with which they lived, the modesty of their dress, and the absence of all superfluity and luxury, which are the ruin and perdition of many families. When we take into account this edifying conduct, this mode of life, ever regulated by the suggestions of reason and the prescriptions of the divine law, we wonder not that they should have something left to give to the poor, whom they always treated with amiability and sweetness.

In their workshop there was never heard even a whisper unbecoming Christian perfection; never was the good name of a neighbour lowered; never were those stories told which only serve to corrupt the heart of the incautious, and sow the seeds of hatred and discord

never was heard the echo of those songs unbecoming a family of saints. If they wanted to lighten the fatigue of their toil with lively airs, they found in the Psalms and sacred odes material enough to raise their spirits, while praising the Lord of all consolation. By such holy conduct, accompanied by prayer, the sanctification of feast days, and all kinds of works of piety and mercy, that illimitable Wisdom and infinite sanctity, which from the Incarnation was possessed by the Child-God, became year by year more manifested in the exterior; so that like a lovely garden He appeared to grow in grace in the eyes of God, and He became more wonderful in the eyes of men.

And so He continued in His lowly workshop till He was thirty years of age, when He lost His putative father, who in his humble trade knew so well how to correspond to the lofty ends for which the Lord had destined him. The Gospel has only one word of praise for the chaste spouse of Mary—it says that he was a *just* man; but with a consummate justice, a justice which involves the highest perfection, and made him worthy to preside over the family of Jesus and Mary. His death was a pattern of the sleep of the just. With his conscience free from all fault and remorse, assisted by the Saviour Himself and His blessed Mother, perfectly resigned to the Divine Will, he expired in the arms of Him who was to be his judge in death and his crown in the kingdom of heaven.

But up to the death of Jesus the gates of Glory were closed by the sin of Adam, and hence the soul of Joseph the just descended to Limbo, surrounded by angelic choirs, and carried to the prisoners detained there the glorious news of their proximate rescue. With what joy were not the holy patriarchs filled on the arrival of the happiest among them! By means of him they surely learned all the mysteries of the life of Jesus, and admiring his countless mercies, and tranquilly awaiting the accomplishment of all their prophecies, they

intoned hymns of gratitude and praise to the Divine Redeemer, praying at the same time that the glorious day of their liberation might be hastened. We do not know where the mortal remains of our blessed Patriarch rest, and hence many piously believe that he was one of those who arose in the triumph of the Saviour, and ascended with Jesus to heaven body and soul. No doubt the eminent sanctity of Joseph gives colour to such a belief, and it is beyond doubt that his power and weight with the King of Glory, if they do not surpass, are at least equal to, those of the brightest seraphim and the greatest saints of the Old or New Testament.





ST. ZITA.

LIGHT FROM THE LOWLY.

Series III.

BLESSED HYPOLITUS GALANTI, SILK-WEAVER.

I.

IN this servant of God all secular people, and above all weavers, have a model of an apostle of the divine glory in the midst of the cares and toil consequent on one's having to earn his bread with the sweat of his brow. Blessed Hypolitus was born in Florence, on the 12th of October, 1565, of parents whose probity and solid virtues were their principal riches. They tried by every means to preserve the innocence of their son, as the richest legacy they could bequeath him. Hence they never let him out of their hands, and took particular care not only to instruct him in the Christian doctrine, and give him a taste for the practices of piety, but also to keep him away from all danger of contamination, and above all, to infuse into him a holy horror of bad companions, the plague of youth and the ruin of innocence. Through this special care the youth grew up, adorned with such graces that he was soon admired for his modesty, application, recollection, and all the virtues becoming a saint. He had a most delicate conscience. In his innocent games it was enough for him to hear

from one of his companions a loose word or a bad story to make him shun him like an infected sheep that might taint him, and deprive him of eternal life. So edifying was his conduct that he was scarcely twelve years of age when he attracted the attention of Alexander de Medicis, then Archbishop of Florence, and afterwards Pope under the name of Leo XI. This prelate, anxious that young lads of the age of Hypolitus should see, as it were, reflected in him the gifts and virtues which should adorn them, sent him to teach the elements of religion to the other boys. He did so, and encouraged many to avoid the dangers of the world, to frequent the sacraments, and consecrate themselves to prayer and pious practices, which give such consolation in troubles and misfortunes. The better to avail himself of the influence of divine grace, during his long life, he distributed his time over religious exercises, works of mercy, and labour.

Apprenticed by his parents to the trade of silkweaver, he made himself beloved by his master for his docility, diligence, and modesty, as well as for his cleverness in doing any work entrusted to him. Convinced that man's greatest enemy is his own passions, which ever struggle to withdraw us from the way marked out by reason and faith, one of the humble weaver's first cares was to deprive them of all incentive, by curbing his inclinations, flying from dangerous diversions and intercourse, conquering the flesh with mortification, and often denying himself what was fair and lawful in order to control himself within the limits of the law of God. Every sacrifice was sweet to him if only it tended to Christian perfection. To persevere faithful to his good resolutions, he employed three special means—prayer, a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and frequent approach to the sacraments. The salutary teachings of death and eternity, the sufferings of Jesus, and the heroic

examples of the saints supplied him with abundant material for a short meditation every day. For this purpose he would retire to the house of God, where the silence, the scarcity of light, the melancholy walls, the flickering flame of the pallid lamp, the majesty of the sacred ceremonies, and everything about him, invited him to serious and useful thoughts. But also in his workshop, at the sound of his loom, without neglecting his work, did he know how to keep his mind united to God. The very work he had in hand, the pieces he was weaving, constantly reminded him of the shortness of life, which, like a thread, snaps when least expected. But what wonder that, amid his labours, he knew how to weave his perfection and sanctity, when in the crowded streets and noisy squares he could ever find a corner in his heart to retire to in order to offer to the Almighty the sweet incense of prayer? In this furnace were cast those darts of all the virtues which he aimed at heaven, those ardent acts of faith, hope, and charity which procured for him so many benedictions.

II.

He entertained a filial tenderness for the Queen of Heaven. She was his succour in all his troubles and necessities. He consulted her in all his doubts. He asked her counsel in all his undertakings. He received from her courage and perseverance in all his combats, and through her he triumphed over all the wiles of his enemies. To gain her love he allowed no day to pass without making her some offering. On his knees before her altar he might constantly be seen reciting the Rosary, a favourite devotion of his, which he never neglected no matter how busy. Besides, he prepared for the principal

feasts of his and our beloved Lady and Mother, sometimes with a fervent novena, sometimes with works of mercy, and ever by being more careful not to fall into imperfections, that he might be more pleasing in her maternal eyes, and draw down on himself and the world the benedictions of heaven.

Hypolitus knew well that, though these means were very good and meritorious, they easily lost their efficacy if he did not have recourse to the fountains of sanctity and fortitude, which are the holy sacraments. Hence he often ran to wash his slight stains in the waters of penance, and so prepare himself to sit clothed with the nuptial garment at the Eucharistic table, the source of ineffable treasures. With what confusion and tears did he confess apparently insignificant faults, and with what fervour he received the Bread of the strong! The world did not fail to mock Hypolitus, but Hypolitus laughed at the world in return, and openly trampled on its rules and despised its maxims. Though the followers of the world called him a hypocrite and a cheat, and other things of this sort; though some of his fellow-tradesmen, joining men without the fear of God, endeavoured, by hints and sarcasms, to dissuade him from his pious habits, the earnest weaver never failed to attend devoutly at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, sermons, and the ceremonies of the Church. Notwithstanding its efforts the world feared him, for Hypolitus declared incessant war on it, publishing its wickedness and exposing its snares, into which unwary youth often fall. Well might a lesson be taken from the industrious zeal with which he availed himself of his moments. Every minute his toil left him free he employed sometimes in the reading of good books, other times in the practices of piety, again in instructing the ignorant in the Christian doctrine, but ever in something useful to his soul. It is wonderful what a decided will can do, when favoured by divine

grace. Our magnanimous weaver, without wealth, without patrons, without deep knowledge, with only unwearied and industrious zeal, undertook the reformation of a city like Florence. For this purpose he founded a congregation of persons animated by his own sentiments, intended simply to give instruction in the truths of religion, and to mould in virtue, as well children of both sexes as adults buried in ignorance of their most sacred duties, no less than of the truths necessary for salvation

III.

Like every good work directed to promote the Divine Glory, that of this servant of God met with obstacles which would have scared and broken down others of less courage and determination in the salvation of souls. Hypolitus appeared to gain new strength at sight of the difficulties created by hell, and drew not breath till he saw all conquered, and his noble intentions realised. The tenderness, amiability, and sweetness with which he taught young and old were edifying. He bore with their defects and impertinence; he was all to all, and made the truths of the catechism attractive by stories and anecdotes which impressed them on the minds of his pupils. How true is the saying that more flies are caught with a drop of honey than a barrel of gall! Hence the saint never had recourse to severity till he exhausted all the resources of tenderness which his ardent charity suggested. Incalculable is the number of souls he rescued from the claws of the devil, and restored to the peace and consolation they had lost through sin, and vainly sought in the goods of this miserable exile. There were times when he was contemned and persecuted by the very people whose wounds he wished to heal; but the servant of God answered

this ingratitude with new favours, and above all by asking the God of mercies, like a good pastor, to run to free the prodigal child from the teeth of the infernal wolf.

The zeal of our fervent weaver soon had new imitators in all Italy, and in a few years there were established a multitude of associations under the name of *Congregation of the Christian Doctrine*, adjusted to the rules which Hypolitus gave his, and with the same objects in view. The devout artisan was the soul of his congregation, rousing the lukewarm, aiding the weak, exciting the fervent, calming the impetuous, and edifying all by his conversation and example. In this and other works of mercy equally meritorious Hypolitus spent his life. He died in the odour of sanctity on the 20th March, 1619, at the age of fifty-five. He was gifted with the power of prophecy, and could read the future and penetrate the secret thoughts of men. His name is to this day pronounced with veneration in Tuscany and other places to which the influence of his zeal extended. He was beatified for his heroic virtues and well-established miracles on the 15th of May, 1825, by Pope Leo XII.



BLESSED NICHOLAS DE FLUE, FARMER,
GRAZIER, AND SOLDIER.

I

IN Unterwals, one of the cantons of Switzerland, on the high altar of the beautiful church of Saulm, there is offered to the devotion of the faithful a kneeling statue on top of a marble tomb, inlaid with gold and precious stones, and bearing on its neck several military decorations. It represents a warrior of the fifteenth century, who with his sword in one hand, and his beads in the other, fought valiantly against the enemies of his religion

and country. This warrior, called by his countrymen Brother Claus, is the blessed Nicholas de Flue, the perfect model of fervent Catholics. This servant of God was born in the village of Fluhly, on the 21st of March, 1417, when the prelates of the Church were trying, in the Council of Constance, to bring the schism which divided her to a close. The parents of Nicholas were decent graziers, who lived comfortably on the produce of their farm and stock, and bore a high character among their neighbours. Fearing God, and deeply devout to the Blessed Virgin, they infused into their children that modesty, simplicity, devotion, and charity, which they had received as their best inheritance from their own parents and grandparents. Above all in Nicholas, whose reason was more developed than his age, the Christian maxims of his pious parents cast such deep roots, that his tender devotion was their delight and enchantment from his earliest years. They always found him ready to obey their slightest hint, never lazy or negligent in fulfilling their commands; always sweet and tender, never bitter or ill-humoured; ever truthful and sincere, never false or double-dealing. Simplicity, modesty, and candour were the precious fruits of innocence, which he preserved unstained throughout life.

Dedicated by his father to herding and the cultivation of the farm, he learned how to perfectly harmonise these occupations with the exercises of piety. Whenever he went alone to his labours or to look after his flock, he was always repeating the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin. When at sunset he returned home, he found the greatest pleasure in entering the church of Fluhly, and praying to God and the Queen of Angels. Sometimes, on the pretext of working a little longer, he allowed his companions to leave, and then retired to some solitary spot to give himself up to meditation on the divine mysteries.

Everything in those solitudes invited him to raise his

mind to the Omnipotent—the hills and the valleys, the woods and the meadows. From his very door almost he could contemplate a grand panorama, which by its variety and beauty elevated the soul to the consideration of the divine beauties. The beautiful lake of Sarnen, whose crystal waters reflected like a mirror the city surrounded by delightful suburbs, contained multitudes of fish that sometimes glided along quietly, and at other times rushed on rapid fins, now rising to the surface, now sinking to the caverns of the deep, or swimming leisurely through the aquatic plants that abounded in the shallows. On one hand is the Tibilis and Surene Alps, whose peaks, covered with eternal snow, are lost in the clouds, and on whose sides are many shepherds' huts, dark woods, pleasant meadows, numerous flocks, which all contribute to enhance the scenery; whilst on the other are seen hills and valleys, white villages crowned by the red towers of the churches, rustic chapels, and here and there pious crosses, which silently plead for a prayer for the repose of those who suddenly lost their life there. Wherever the eye turns it discovers new and surprising pictures; here foaming waterfalls, there purling streams quietly flowing through the long grass, farther on impetuous torrents carrying with them the trunks of ancient trees, farther still sterile rocks, now smiling plains, and again fearful precipices never visited by the rays of the sun. Such the sights that invited Nicholas to intone a hymn of glory to the Lord, who by His omnipotent power drew all from nothingness.

II.

His devotion and fervour increased on the approach of any feast of the Blessed Virgin. That day morn scarcely dawned when our youth was out in the fields to seek the sweetest flowers to weave a chaplet to be

placed at Mary's feet. But this was not the principal offering he made to our Sovereign Lady : after disposing his soul by a fervent confession, he approached the Eucharistic table to receive the Bread of Angels, for which he ever felt a craving desire. Though of a delicate constitution, he was moved by reading the examples of the saints, with which he refreshed his mind, and above all of his patron, St. Nicholas, to mortify his body from boyhood by fasting and other penances. Of all his occupations that of shepherd pleased him most, for there in the silence of his solitude, broken only by the bleating of the sheep, or the soft murmur of the rills, or the chirping of the birds, or the rumbling of the carts, he could, unwitnessed, pour out his heart in the presence of God, and dedicate himself to the divine praise. But you would be quite mistaken if you thought our shepherd was sad, or dull, or melancholy ; for he was gifted with a quiet disposition, a good address, and genial manner, and made himself beloved by all who knew him. Above all he was his parents' assistance in their toil, the balsam of their pains, their soother in misfortunes, their consolation and their joy.

If he followed his own inclinations, he would at an early age have adopted the contemplative life, renouncing the good matches offered him ; but God wished to make him a model of good husbands, and as soon as he knew the Divine Will, manifested through his Christian parents, he sacrificed his own desires of a more perfect life, and bent his neck to the yoke of holy matrimony. In selecting a wife he did not allow himself to be guided by gifts and qualities, which may soon fade, but sought a maiden of Christian habits and elevated views of sanctity. The strong woman, according to the Scripture, is a treasure without price, and it is more easy to find a crowd of vain and presumptuous girls than a prudent, humble, and industrious maiden. But Nicholas

asked her from the Lord with all the earnestness of his soul, and the Lord never closes His ears to the prayer of the humble. He was married to a virtuous girl named Dora. And as God was the Author of that union, not contracted at the promptings of passion, or the greed of fleeting riches, so the love they bore each other could not be more intimate, nor lighter the burden of matrimony. Their house appeared the dwelling-place of peace and the sweetest concord. Their parents' will also was the will of the newly married—husband and wife, parents and children, all laboured hard to mutually please each other, and promote the spiritual well-being of the family. Not a loud voice nor disagreeable scold ever disturbed the order of that peaceful dwelling. All followed in the footsteps of Nicholas, the soul of the spiritual exercises they performed in common, the model of assiduity in labour, of charity to the poor, and of the harmony of will so conspicuous in all their actions. Let no one imagine, however, that they attained this happiness without mortification. They were not angels, but people of flesh and blood like others, and had consequently to subject their passions to reason, to look over each other's defects, and suffer with each other's weaknesses and ill-humour. Thus, and only thus, by a faithful correspondence to the divine inspirations, can that love be perfectly conceived which closely unites the hearts of a Christian family, and drives away turbulence and discord. Then one commands with suavity, whilst another obeys without repugnance: mutual charity is the rule that guides all; all love each other as they should love: idleness yields to labour, prayer, or some becoming and innocent diversion: the joy of the just is depicted on the countenances of all: free from remorse all live happy with the fruits of peace. Blessed the family which with the aroma of such virtue brings down on it the dew of heaven!

III.

Soon did innocent Dora rival her husband in virtue and piety. She joined him whenever she could in his devotions, and she never ceased thanking God for having given her a companion so holy and amiable. And this again encouraged Nicholas to spread the wings of his heart, and allow himself to be carried away by the breath of its fervour. He usually rose at midnight and spent a couple of hours treating with God about the affairs of his soul, or buried in contemplation of the divine perfections. Our Lord blessed their union with five sons and five daughters, into all of whom the good father endeavoured to infuse his own sentiments. Man does not live by bread alone ; and though he vegetate and grow on his daily food, if the soul be not sustained by due knowledge, and the heart nurtured by solid virtues, the more noble part of man becomes enslaved by the vilest and fiercest passions, and the order and plans of the Almighty are perverted. Hence Nicholas fed his children's understanding with the Christian doctrine, and their will with edifying examples and counsels, thus transmitting to his posterity his own virtues as a more precious inheritance than all the goods of earth.

When he was about thirty years of age he saw the independence of Switzerland threatened by powerful enemies, who were trying to disturb her repose. When the decision of the Supreme Council of his canton was published, calling all the citizens to arms, Nicholas—though from his sweetness of disposition and piety he regarded bloody combats with horror—flew, nevertheless, to his country's aid at the first call of the magistrates, and prepared to carry himself like a Christian soldier in the expedition of which he was to form part. He took leave of his beloved wife, giving her prudent counsels for the time of his absence, and in case he should die.

in the struggle. When the day of his departure arrived, after a fervent confession, he approached, with angelical ardour, the sacred table to eat the Bread of the strong, the support of the traveller and the shield of the valiant. Piety does not smother true military ardour, but ennobles and increases it. When the two rival armies came face to face, they hastened to give the decisive battle. The army of Eschwitz and Glaris, commanded by Ital Reding, was encamped on Mount Etzel; that of Zurich was before Pfeffiken. The encounter was terrible: the cannons vomited out death; the small arms, enveloped in smoke, spread desolation; and in the midst of the fearful carnage and the cries of the wounded, no sooner was the attack sounded than the enemies closed in a hand-to-hand contest, in which with swords and knives they killed or were killed, till at last victory declared in favour of justice. You would think the destroying angel had descended to destroy the army of Zurich, such was the terror and consternation which pervaded its ranks. Pressed on every side, they hastened to the mountains and woods, leaving none but their dead, dying, and prisoners on the field of battle. The bravery and daring of our hero contributed not a little to the favourable result of the battle, as did also his encouraging words, which electrified the valiant; but whilst all were loud in his praises, he only wondered that they should commend him for acting the part of a good citizen.

In 1446, he joined another expedition against the Austrians, in which a body of one thousand two hundred Swiss completely routed an army of six thousand of the enemy. After these brilliant expeditions, in which the Lord seemed to have engaged him, that he might restrain the licence and disorders of his comrades, he returned to his domestic hearth to fill his family with consolation as he had the enemy with terror. He continued his

pious practices with renewed fervour, which the rude clash of arms could not make him abandon, and again dedicated himself to the education of his children.

IV.

He taught them to be sober and temperate, and content with the productions of nature, without hunting for delicacies. Reared up in frugality from their tenderest years, the instructions of their zealous father made a deep impression on them. He tried to infuse into them a profound horror of every sin, but particularly of the vice of intemperance, the hateful mother of infinite disorders. On Sundays he permitted only the purely necessary labours, and made all in his house sanctify them like good Christians. When he returned from Mass he collected his family in a convenient place, and read for them passages from Scripture or the Lives of the Saints, adding some reflections of his own to impress them on the willing minds of his audience, and attach them to all kinds of virtue. He accommodated himself to the capacity of all, and warned them against the seductions of the world, whilst inspiring them with a contempt of all perishing things. "Ah, my children!" he used to say to them, "what does it avail a man to gain the whole world if he lose his own soul? Let us save the soul, and all is well." His heroic example, his liberality to the needy, his mortification, gave great weight and efficacy to his paternal admonitions and advice. His great anxiety was to fill his family with an ardent love of God and their neighbour, founded on the exact compliance with the divine commandments. What made all love and respect Nicholas was his unalterable calm and tranquillity in the midst of contradictions, and the facility with which he pardoned his enemies, completely forgetting the injuries done him. In correcting

the faults of his children he never allowed himself to be carried away by angry passion, which is a greater defect in some parents than the one they intended to correct. When it was necessary to use certain severity for the correction of the culprit, our hero knew how to temper it with such suavity and sweetness that rarely did he fail to attain his noble object. Meakness accompanied him in all places and in all circumstances. Hence, whenever his children answered to his desires, he encouraged them with rewards, thus avoiding the necessity of appealing to severe measures : but whether by one means or the other he never allowed an opportunity to escape of confirming them in good, and withdrawing them from the dangers of the world. His hopes and assiduous prayers for the good education of his family were crowned by the most filial correspondence. Together they said the Rosary, together they accompanied their father to frequent confession, together they went to the devotions in the church, together they took their amusement and recreation.

V.

Twelve years had passed since the last campaign of the servant of God, when new dissensions sprung up between Austria and the Swiss cantons. Segismund, excommunicated by Pius II., had aroused the confederates against him, and all prepared for a new struggle. Nicholas, already famous for his military ardour, was called by the government of his canton, and appointed commandant of a company of one hundred men. Placed at the head of this handful of brave fellows, he gave, as on other occasions, proof of magnanimous daring and deep piety. Like an angel of peace in the midst of the furies of war, he repressed the licence of the soldiery,

and became the guardian of the innocent and unprotected. "Share your bread with the widow," he would say to his comrades; "cover the orphan with your cloak; employ your sword in defence of the weak; steal not so much as a pin; respect the sanctuary of the Most High."

In Diessenhofen, a village of Thurgovia, situated on the banks of the Rhine, there was a convent of nuns, called the Convent of the Valley of St. Catherine. There several companies of the enemy had fortified themselves. The Swiss, breathing vengeance, and anxious to put an end to them, had their torches lit to set fire to the asylum of their adversaries. Fortunately or unfortunately, Nicholas' company was ordered to execute this project, favoured by the darkness of the night. The Christian soldier shuddered at the sole thought of being selected to burn the temple of the Lord, and violate the retirement of the innocent virgins, exposed to fall into the hands of a mad soldiery; and with his eyes bathed in tears, he prostrated himself at the foot of a crucifix in sight of his men, and prayed the Lord to touch the heart of the generals, and make them desist from their intention. After a short but fervent supplication he arose, and went to speak to the heads of the expedition. "Confederates," he said to them in full assembly, "you have left your homes to attack an unjust enemy, and defend your liberty. The justice of our cause is the support of our arms in combat, as it will be our guarantee after victory. Take care, then, not to stain it by excesses as unworthy as useless. Think you that war is sufficient motive to rashly place your hands on the sanctuary of the living God, to give to the flames the dwelling of the Holy of Holies? I do not believe it, and I am certain that by doing so you will only provoke the divine wrath, and oblige the Lord to snatch the palm of victory from your hands. And for what purpose? To root out a

handful of cowards, whom, you may rest assured, hunger will put to flight. Do not, then, allow the shouts of death and extermination to be heard under the roof, which up to this has only echoed the praises of the Omnipotent. Do not compel those poor virgins to drain the chalice of bitterness to the dregs. Is it not misfortune enough for them to have been obliged in their impotence to open their gates to the enemy? Let the latter alone pay the penalty of their impiety; let us not make ourselves accomplices of their crime. Yes; save that edifice which will stand as a monument of your moderation and your valour." Then he ceased, and cast an inquiring look on his hearers, who had listened to him with attention and respect. The result was all he desired. The convent was besieged, and the Austrians, finding themselves doomed, capitulated. Nicholas, availing himself of his success and the reputation it gained him, reproved the confederates for the extreme facility with which they permitted the ruin of houses consecrated to God, and threatened them with the divine vengeance, if, as happened on other occasions, they coolly allowed rash young men to carry fire and sword into the temples, to profane the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar, and turn the churches into stables. The complaints of the valiant soldier induced the generals of the army to take steps to prevent like disorders.

Nicholas continued to give proofs of incomparable daring, which, together with his prudence and generosity, merited for him a gold medal, struck in testimony of his greatness of soul. This is how Christians defend their outraged religion and their offended country. When returning to the bosom of his family, after the glorious end of the campaign, he distributed on his way all the alms he could, without distinction of friends or foes. Indescribable was the consolation of his wife and children when, gathered around him after so many

dangers, they heard from his lips the favours he had received from heaven in the midst of the tumults of war, the risks he had run of his life, and the bloody encounters he had had with the enemy. "God grant," said they all, "you may never have to leave us again in the sad orphanage in which we have lived!"

VI.

Our grazier was scarcely well at home, and rested from the fatigues of war, when he was designated by the public voice *Landamman*, or Governor of the Canton of Unterwalden. The Council confirmed the vote of his fellow-citizens, and sent a commission to the servant of God to put in his hands the reins of public affairs. But Nicholas, in whose eyes public charges were nothing but real burdens, on one hand, looking beneath the veil which gives to dignities a seductive brilliancy, and prevents one from seeing the terrible account which earthly judges shall have to render to the Supreme Judge; and considering, on the other, the facility with which those who occupy elevated positions allow themselves to be conquered by interest, hurried on by envy, suborned by recommendations, seduced by flattery, humbly and modestly refused the dignity and honour offered him. Forced, however, in spite of himself to discharge the functions of judge of the district, he always acted with supreme integrity and justice. His rectitude and clearness prevented the litigants from appealing from his decisions. When any quarrel or dispute arose, he called the parties together, and, seated among them, heard the reasons *pro* and *con*, and then gave his judgment. Soon was his house converted into the refuge of the oppressed: from all quarters they flocked to consult him on thorny questions, and his sentences were looked on as those of an oracle. His impar-

tiality and justice were such, that when talking one day to his good friend Henry, parish priest of Estanz, he was able to exclaim: "Blessed be God, who gave me a spirit of rectitude! In all the affairs of my country in which I have been consulted, in all the decisions I have given during my life, I do not remember overlooking law and justice. On all occasions, after imploring the lights of the Holy Ghost, I listened to the voice of conscience, and without regarding the dress of accuser or accused, decided the case." How well the world would go on if all judges and governors had an equal fear of God!

The servant of God was now fifty years of age, when he thought he was no longer necessary to his fellow-men or his family, and his old desires of a solitary life began to spring up in his heart. Nicholas was accustomed to make frequent pilgrimages to Our Lady of the Hermitage. There, when he considered the virtues, the self-denial, and abnegation of the Benedictine religious who occupied that sanctuary; when he reflected that day and night they were engaged in singing the praises of the Most High, he felt himself inflamed with a holy envy and with ardent desires to go and live hidden in the desert. He had gradually prepared his family, who for some time had with a certain fear foreseen such a determination. God, on His part, was impelling him to fly from the world and to hide himself in solitude.

VII.

When visiting his flock one day, he retired as usual and knelt down in prayer. In a short time he lost his senses, and, carried away in spirit, he thought he saw a fragrant lily, fresh as the dew of morning, white as the driven snow, which, coming out of his mouth, grew till it was lost in the heavens. Whilst enjoying the per-

fume and beauty of this portentous flower, there came a blast of wind, which bent it and caused it to fall into the mouth of one of the horses which were grazing about. From this vision Nicholas understood how small is the security of virtue in the midst of the many dangers which surround us, like animals ready to devour it. Man is a flower which is withered by the slightest breath, which appears to-day in all its beauty and to-morrow is turned into dust. Only the watering of prayer and mortification can preserve its freshness some instants longer. And where, he said to himself, where better than in the desert can I dedicate myself to prayer and fasting?

On another occasion, when he was meditating in solitude, he heard a charming voice which came from the desert. He looked and saw in the distance a man with a beautiful countenance, venerable in his gray hair, who appeared to approach him with grave step. At first he heard only one voice, and then three, and he was almost beside himself. When the person with the three mysterious voices met Nicholas, he ceased singing, and, uncovering his head, on his knees asked him for an alms for the love of God. Our shepherd, who could never dismiss the poor empty, took out his purse and gave him what he asked. The venerable old man thanked him for his liberality, and vanished from his sight, leaving the charitable servant of God full of ineffable sweetness. Then he went on his knees to thank the Lord for that favour, realising how suited was a retired life to treat with God and receive His divine graces.

One day, when engaged at his domestic duties, he met three men, who resembled each other very much, of majestic aspect, whose manners and discourse breathed nothing but sanctity. One of them said to him: "Tell us, Nicholas, will you subject yourself to

our power and direction?" "I surrender myself," answered the saint, "to no one but my God. The world is dead to me, and I despise its mad vanities." At these words the strangers looked at each other with joyful countenances, and the first added, smiling: "Remain, then, constant in your good resolutions, and know that at seventy years of age your soul, freed from the bonds of this corruptible body, will fly to receive the crown of glory. Great struggles await you, great labours and disappointments. Fight like the valiant man you are, for the sufferings of the cross will be followed by the glory of triumph." On saying this they disappeared, leaving Nicholas inundated with joy, and resolved to carry out his plans of solitude and retirement. In proportion as the divine illuminations increased, the devil redoubled his efforts to detain him at least in the world. He raised up great obstacles; he tried to overpower him with rude combats, and left no stone unturned to dishearten the servant of God. "Why this life so austere?" he said: "why those continual privations and penances? Is man condemned to drag out so melancholy a life that he cannot enjoy even innocent pleasures?" Guided by his good angel, the saint silenced the enemy's battery, and prepared to put his designs in execution as soon as possible. Having obtained the permission of his director, who could no longer doubt of the Divine Will in his penitent's vocation, he only now required the consent of his wife.

VIII.

One day, after receiving Communion with extraordinary fervour, he called her and said: "My beloved Dora, there is a great weight on my heart, and you alone can remove it. Have you strength to do so?" A deep and involuntary sigh escaped from that loving

breast, and it was only then he knew the strength of the bonds he was trying to break. Dora, penetrating the eloquent looks of her husband, sweetly answered: "Whence comes this want of confidence? Is it not I who have always helped you to bear your sufferings and mitigated your griefs?" Tears choked her utterance, and Nicholas, in order to console her, said: "Yes; I should be very unjust if I did not acknowledge your care, which God alone can worthily recompense. Since your foot crossed my threshold, God has not ceased to bless us, nor have you failed to give me the most unequivocal proofs of sincerest love. Not content with dividing with me the pains and crosses of this exile, you have often devised means to bear the whole weight yourself. If our children are our consolation, to what is it due but the Christian education you gave them? Thank God, they need me no longer, and you alone can be their guardian angel and their guide. As for me, my dear, God calls me to solitude; your permission alone is wanting, that I may abandon this deceitful world and give myself entirely to God." Dora, tremulous with grief, threw herself at his feet, bathed in a sea of tears, and in broken sobs said: "And is it thus you would repay my affection? For God's sake, I beseech you never to desert me." The tears of husband and wife were mingled, and neither was able to utter a word. At last, when they recovered from their grief, Dora yielded to the powerful reasons of Nicholas, and offered to God the sacrifice of what she most loved in the world. Rude combats he had also to sustain with his old parents, his children, and his neighbours, who loved him as a brother, but his firmness triumphed over all. Having arranged his affairs, and made his will, the Monday appointed for his farewell arrived.

On that morning he rose early, and went to hear Mass and receive Holy Communion with his children

his wife, and some friends. That morning appeared a day of mourning to the whole village ; but heaven celebrated with feasts of joy one of the greatest victories of grace over nature. When all were again in the house Nicholas appeared before them, with head and feet bare, dressed in kersey like a pilgrim, a rough stick and the rosary beads in his hand. He asked pardon of all for his faults, he tenderly recommended them to the holy fear of God, and the faithful observance of His commandments, and after embracing them and giving them his benediction, he set out, free from the fetters which hitherto had bound him. He bore witness several times that that parting was very painful to him, and that a special grace of God alone enabled him to tear himself away from the love of his wife and children. The grief in which the whole family were buried can only be conceived by a heart as tender and loving as their own.

IX.

The servant of God went in search of some solitude accompanied only by his angel guardian, without knowing exactly whither. His plan was to leave Switzerland, that he might live completely unknown to men. He directed his steps to Basil, reciting the Holy Rosary and other prayers, and devoutly visiting the churches he met on his way. He passed the first day without food, and resting at night under a tree, he remained there till sleep closed his eyes. The following day he continued his march, and after traversing the fertile valleys of his country, he came to the heights of Hanenstein. Here, seated on a rock, he fell asleep, and in a dream he thought he saw the little town of Liestall on fire. He awoke in a fright, and looking round saw a farmer near him. He fell into conversation with him, and moved by an interior impulse, explained to him his

views, and asked him to show him some retired place where he could carry them out. The farmer was a God-fearing man; he admired and praised his project, but advised him to return to his own country, where he should find deserts enough in which to live retired and tranquil without running the risk of being taken for a vagabond and culprit, as was very possible in a strange place considering the disturbed state of the times. The devout pilgrim, after thanking the farmer for his good counsel, affectionately shook hands with him, and taking his advice as coming from heaven, returned towards his own canton. The night was serene, and praying at the foot of an oak, he asked the Lord to manifest His holy will with regard to the place in which he should fix his dwelling. At first he passed a delicious night, inundated with heavenly sweetness, but soon the devil, jealous of the felicity of the new hermit, attacked him, though all in vain, with sad reflections. When he closed his eyes, overcome by sleep, he thought he was surrounded by a brilliant light, and that they were drawing him by force to his own country, and at the same time he felt his interior attacked by an intense pain, as if he had been transfixed by a sword. From that time Nicholas never felt the necessity of food, and during the twenty years following he neither ate nor drank, nor tasted anything but the Holy Eucharist. This miracle, subjected during the lifetime of the beatified to a scrupulous examination, is admitted as indubitable even by Protestant historians like Muller. In memory of this vision and event a chapel was afterwards built on the spot.

The following day our hermit continued his march, and rested not till he reached Melcthal, his own country. As he had made a vow of poverty, he hid himself from his acquaintances that he might live apart from the whole world and its goods, and he selected for his retreat one

of his former possessions, called Kluster. Here, in the midst of briers and thorns, Nicholas built for himself a little hut of branches. Eight days he had passed in this solitude without eating or drinking, occupied solely in the contemplation of divine truths, when he was discovered by some hunters who were in pursuit of a deer. They withdrew, however, in silence, but determined to report the matter to his family. Peter Deflue, his brother, on hearing it, immediately set out in search of him. The sight of his penitent brother, emaciated now by his continual abstinence, caused him a certain horror mingled with compassion. He made great efforts to take him home, but when he could gain nothing he besought him not to die of starvation. Nicholas told him to have no fear, for God was preserving his life; so that he had now passed eleven days without tasting anything and without feeling hunger or thirst. When leaving he asked him to send him a confessor, that he might open his conscience to him.

X.

Oswald Isner, the zealous parish priest of Kerns, went to him, and he left an account of his visit in the parish book of 1488. "Nicholas," he says, "sent for me to ask whether he should continue his rigorous fast. He was nothing but skin and bone, and you could see the light through his cheeks. Convinced that it was a miracle, I told him he might continue as long as he could without danger of death. As I was fond of the hermit, and he of me, I asked him one day, very earnestly, how he could live without eating. He told me as a secret that when he attended Mass, and the priest communicated, he received from the Communion, or the desire of receiving it, such grace that his strength was renewed

without any need of eating or drinking. 'And what is there strange in this?' said the servant of God. 'Do I not in the Eucharist receive Jesus Christ, the Author of life, the Creator of heaven and earth?' So that he could say with the apostle: 'I live, not I, but Jesus Christ lives in me.'"

When the rumour of a life so miraculous spread, he soon was the object of visits from his friends, his family, and many others, who came to see the man of God and be edified by the perfume of his heroic virtues. The concourse of those who went to see and to consult him became so great that his silence and retirement were disturbed, and he was forced to seek another asylum more isolated and less accessible to men. After examining several solitary places, he saw four brilliant rays of light descend from heaven on a dark ravine, by which the roaring and foaming Melk hurried on its course. "There," he said, "does the Lord wish me to pitch my tent." No sooner said than done. He built a hut, surrounded by thick brushwood, and continued his retirement in almost constant prayer. This place was only a quarter of a league from his house, for whose inhabitants he daily prayed to God. There he was also discovered, and his children built him a chapel and a little room, that their beloved father might have some comfort. Joyful and tranquil he lived in his cell, praying daily to the Queen of Angels, whose image he venerated in his oratory. He never left his retirement except on Sundays and festival days, when he went to the parish church of Laxlen. He also left it sometimes in the year to gain the indulgences granted to certain sanctuaries celebrated in the diocese of Lucerne. His family, anxious to procure for the devout hermit the consolation of hearing Mass in his own oratory, at least on Sundays and festival days, that he might not have to descend to the valley during the long and rigorous

winters of that country, asked and obtained this favour from the bishop of Constance, Herman de Landerbeg.

In the meantime his supernatural and extraordinary life became known through all the cantons, and even passed their frontiers. Diverse were the opinions on this point. In the eyes of pious and simple people Nicholas was another Baptist, who came to preach penance by his example. In the opinion of the unbelievers the hermit was an impostor and a hypocrite, who tried to purchase the title of Saint by his apparent abstinence: each judged the miracle according to the affections of his heart. The ecclesiastical authority, in view of these opposing opinions, thought it right to solemnly examine the fact, either to prove or disprove it. With the sanction of the civil authority of the canton of Unterwald, they determined to plant sentinels on all the approaches, so that no one could go to the hermit's dwelling without being seen. They selected for the purpose men of known probity, and after a month of careful watching these testified on oath, that no one carried him the least food. The bishop of Constance employed another artifice to satisfy himself still more of the miracle. With the excuse of consecrating the little chapel, he sent his suffragan, the Bishop of Ascalon, to examine the matter personally. The prelate put several difficult questions to him, which Nicholas answered with a precision worthy of a profound theologian. Among other things he asked him what was the first virtue of a Christian. "Holy obedience," answered the saint. "Well, then," replied the bishop, "here is a piece of bread and a little wine: in virtue of this holy obedience I command you to eat and drink in my presence." "I do not refuse," answered the penitent; "but I beseech you to pardon me unless you wish to subject me to terrible sufferings." The prelate insisted, and the servant of God obeyed submissively; but

he had scarcely tasted a mouthful of bread, when he felt such a pain in his stomach that they thought he was going to die in their hands. The bishop, annoyed at being the cause, recommended himself to the prayers of the good hermit, and left him in peace. Before leaving he made a present to the solitary of two candlesticks and a sum of money. Nicholas sent the candlesticks to the parish church, and spent the money on ornaments for his oratory. The Emperor Segismund of Austria, sent his own doctor, the learned Buckard de Hornek, and after an examination extending over several days, he also confessed himself conquered. Frederick III., Emperor of Germany, had also to bow his diadem before the divine power manifested in the solitary. When they asked him how could it be, pointing to heaven he answered: "Look up, there is the God who knows." These facts are found in contemporary writings, which are preserved in the archives of Saxlen, and are supported by all the documents required by the most strict criticism.

XI.

When Nicholas triumphed over his detractors, what he thought of least was his victory, desiring only that God should be glorified and loved by all. Completely forgetful of the world, his only ambition was the sanctification of his soul and the eternal salvation of his brethren. At last the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass was celebrated in his oratory, for which he had received great gifts and precious ornaments from kings and nobles. It is impossible to describe the fervour with which he attended, the august ceremony. Transported in spirit to Calvary, he thought he saw the Saviour expiring on the cross for the salvation of the world. He could have wished the Holy Sacrifice to last longer, that he might reflect at

leisure on the torments of Jesus and keep Him company in His agony. He received Communion three times a month, which was remarkable at that time when the reception of the sacraments was rare; but if he were guided by the hunger he had for the Eucharistic Bread, he would have allowed no day to pass without approaching the sacred table. The life he led was like that of the ancient anchorets of Egypt. From midnight to Mass he spent in humble contemplation of the divine mysteries; from Mass to mid-day he recited his devotions; and afterwards he gave audience to those who came to consult him. He then took a walk before his cell, and at sunset he returned to his prayers and meditation till well on in the night, when he took a short rest on the hard ground.

By his admirable example of all virtues he edified those simple peasants, whom he served as oracle, just judge and tender father. Now no one went to Our Lady of the Hermitage without paying a visit to Nicholas to ask for advice in their doubts, and seek consolation in their troubles. Long after did those Swiss talk of the maxims and exhortations of the holy Hermit. To a mother who fretted over her numerous offspring, he said: "Bless God, my sister, for a hearth without children is a sky without stars." To a man who envied his tranquillity and retirement, he answered: "The road of the desert is not the only one that leads to heaven. Fear and serve God and you shall enjoy peace." He exhorted all his compatriots with prophetic spirit to never become renegades to their religion, bewailing beforehand the evils which Protestantism was to bring on his country. "Preserve the faith of your fathers," he said to them; "cling fast to your mother, the Catholic Church, the firm foundation of all true happiness. Great tempests are gathering; be ready to meet them." And, in fact, Charles the Bold, a little after, threatened

the peace of Switzerland. In the first encounter the confederates were beaten: but gathering new courage from their defeat, they returned to the combat, and conquered the army of Burgundy, taking rich booty. The solitary in the meantime was praying for the prosperity of his country.

Charles, exasperated at seeing his banners trampled on, renews the contest with fresh reinforcements, assured of victory. Numerous vehicles follow him laden with ropes to tie the vanquished. At the voice of their priests the Swiss run to stem the common danger. At the moment when the peaks of the Alps were about re-echoing the fearful shout of attack, the clouds which obscured the heavens burst open, and the sun inundated the enemy's camps with his rays. "Dear confederates," exclaimed Hallwyl, "the lamp of the God of goodness comes to illumine us. At them!" The battle began on the 22nd of June, 1476. They attacked each other like lions, but at nightfall the army of Charles no longer existed. At that moment a brave youth reaches Friburg, worn out with fatigue, to announce the glorious news, and falls dead murmuring, "Victory!" The Lord had heard the prayer of His servant for the success of his fellow-citizens.

XII.

A few years after, in 1481, the parish priest of Estanz, after earnest prayer, arose, and taking his stick, said: "I will go and see the good solitary." It was scarcely day when he knocked at the hermit's door, and found his friend at prayer. After the usual greetings, the priest sat down on a bench, and said: "Brother, a great danger at this moment threatens Switzerland. What the Bold's sword could not accomplish, has been done by the prosperity and gold acquired on the field of

battle. Sleeping on their laurels, our people have become slaves to effeminacy and discord. To-morrow the confederates will meet at Estanz, and if God did not say it, Swiss blood will flow in torrents. Brother, time urges: you must be the angel of peace by speaking to the assembly: my heart assures me your voice will be heard." "Yes, I will go," said Nicholas, "tell them I wish to speak to them." They met as arranged; and whilst the zealous priest was going from lodging to lodging, where the deputies were emptying numerous tumblers of foaming ale, Nicholas, with the haste his years permitted, was traversing the great street of Estanz barefooted, with his head bare, a stick in one hand and his beads in the other, and his beard covered with frozen dew. He walked along with recollected gait, saluting on either side the neighbours who thronged at doors and windows to see the saint. In a moment the news of the hermit's arrival spread. The assembly-room was full of the confederate deputies, when the priest presented himself, and overcome with joy, cried out: "Brother Claus!" Just then Nicholas was mounting the stairs, assisted by two Swiss. On the entrance of the venerable man, they all rose up, and respectfully bowed to him when passing. Joy and anxiety were depicted on those countenances, some of which bore scars received in defence of their country.

After a short murmur, the indication of the satisfaction all derived from the presence of the solitary, they subsided into respectful silence. "Beloved brethren," then began Nicholas, "God be with you. I come on the wings of charity, which, I hope, may inspire you all. Tranquil was I in my solitude praying for my beloved country, when the worthy priest of Estanz, with tears in his eyes, come to entreat me to speak to you words, of peace and concord. My friends, and at what a time you are divided! The Lord has just given you the laurel of victory, and you wish to strip it of its leaves!

Remember that solemn moment when, prostrated all on the field of battle, you fervently implored the aid of the God of armies; and the sun bursting through the clouds, came to illumine your triumph. God's be the glory, and yours the reward and the fruits. But the fruits of victory are peace and order, which you confound with your rich spoils, the dire cause of discord. What do you want to do? Do you want to destroy the tree of life that you may contend for the fruits of the tree of death? Is this your gratitude to the Lord for the victories won in Grandson, Morad, and Nancy? Poor but united, you will be the terror of your enemies; rich, but divided, you will be nothing but the ruin of your country. Be, then, what you were there—one soul and one flag against the common enemy. Now your enemy is discord. Have but one heart, and you will be strong; and God will bless you. No; I shall not leave Estanz till I see you give each other the kiss of peace and reconciliation, and shake hands like honest Swiss. May God bless you a thousand times! May He bless your towns, and your country, and your families! Peace, my friends, peace and concord, in the name of the God of peace!" The hermit had scarcely concluded, when the deputies, instinctively rising, threw themselves into each others' arms, and affectionately shook hands, amid tears and sobs, which smothered their voices. Then they all cried out at once: "Long live brother Claus!" "Live Jesus and His holy name!" answered Nicholas; and in the midst of a complete ovation he returned to his beloved hermitage.

Thus do men of retired life sacrifice their solitude, when the good of their brethren demands it. For his neighbour's good, Anthony abandoned the desert, and Catherine the retirement of the cloister. All contemplatives, not content with lifting their pure hands night and day to the God of mercies, to detain the shafts

of His vengeance, and bring down a shower of benedictions on the people, have in all times come out from their retreat to instruct the ignorant, to aid the weak, to die in consoling the sick abandoned by their nearest and dearest. And is there a man to raise a cry against those benefactors of humanity?—to persecute them in their very homes, the dwellings of peace and benediction? Ay, those madmen do it, who pretend to regenerate society by immorality, robbery, anarchy, and libertinism—those miserable conspirators, who plot to bring into play their subversive and infernal plans, forged in the dark caves of abomination and error. May God enlighten them, and show them in the life of our hermit a practical proof of the falsity of their vain utopias! May God bring them into the fold, the only home of true prosperity!

XIII.

When the news of the peace, secured by the saint's zeal, was spread, all the cantons and towns of Switzerland sent commissioners to assure the solitary of their gratitude for the service rendered his country. The good Nicholas received them all with his own peculiar charity and modesty, and humbly acknowledged their compliments. To those who brought him some recompense, he said that he was more than repaid in the peace of the cantons. With this victory of charity the number of the pious man's visitors increased, and he received them all with amiability and sweetness, giving to each the advice most suited for the salvation of his soul. He only denied audience to those who came to disturb his repose through vain curiosity, or to try him like hypocritical pharisees. He was gifted with the power of penetrating spirits and reading the future, and used it whenever he thought it conducive to the greater glory of God.

One day there came to him a man who had lived a long time in adultery. Nicholas answered all his questions with great charity, and gradually drew round the conversation to the wounds which had occasioned in him the death of grace. The stranger was alarmed at hearing from the hermit's mouth the secrets known only to himself and his accomplice; but opening his ears to the charitable warnings of the Solitary, he saw the abyss of eternal perdition open at his feet, and bewailed his crimes with tears of true repentance.

Another day a young lady came to him dressed with unmeaning luxury. Nicholas, who deeply loved poverty and hated such vanities, said to her: "What are those sumptuous adornments for, and that dress purchased in a foreign land? Do you think to thus escape death or open to yourself the gates of heaven? Better you should save for the poor and the numerous family God will give you. But your children will upset your vanity; and you will not bring to mind this friendly advice given you by a poor solitary till, with a torch in your hand, you go out to separate them when they come to blows." And in fact she soon forgot the salutary words of the hermit. She had eleven sons, who were the plague of her life; and one day, when they came to blows, she was alarmed by the shouts of the bystanders, and, knowing not what to do, she snatched up a piece of burning wood and ran between them to separate them. On seeing her the unnatural sons desisted, and the mother, remembering then the prophecy of Nicholas, raised her eyes to heaven, and, turning to her children with a sigh, tearfully related what occurred. Then the good brothers embraced, and renounced their discords for ever.

When the deputies of Berne were going to the Diet of Estantz, they visited our solitary, to spend a while with the oracle of the country. The saint as ever exhorted them to the fear of God and the fulfilment of the

divine commandments; and, foreseeing the calamities which threatened his country, thus addressed them: "I cannot conceal from you, fathers of the country, certain events which oppress my heart. Religion will suffer much some time after my death. Oh, grief! what misfortunes will then rain on this unfortunate land! For Jesus's sake I beseech you not to be seduced by the false appearance of novelty. Cling to the ancient faith, do not allow yourselves to be agitated like weathercocks by the wind of new doctrines. Preserve the religion of your fathers: avoid new teachers and despise them, for they can do nothing but lead you astray." The sad prophecy of the venerable man was fulfilled, and Berne was one of the cantons most infected by the errors of Zuinglius and Calvin.

Of course, like a good solitary, he had his contests with the devil; and the devil, as he did in other times to the Anthonys, the Pacomios, and the Benets, attacked him fearfully, sometimes burying his soul in desolation and bitterness. Brother Ulrich related that the servant of God was twice strongly tempted to abandon solitude and return to enjoy domestic happiness. But he always came off victorious over hell by having recourse to prayer and the aid of the Queen of Angels. This is borne witness to by this disciple of the servant of God, to whom we owe many particulars of his life. Ulrich was a German gentleman, a native of Bavaria, who, after various adventures, had renounced the world and joined Nicholas in the service of God, as several others had desired to do. God, in his turn, crowned the victories of his servant with new and special favours. The consideration of the sufferings of Jesus Christ was to him a spring of graces: in the shadow of the tree of the cross Nicholas enjoyed the fruits of eternal life. At sight of the sacred wood and the ingratitude of men he burst into bitter and sweet tears, with which he would

have desired to wash out the sins of the whole world. He would have wished to burn all in the flame of divine love, in the fire of the love of Jesus crucified. He wrote to the governors of Berne: "Put down public vices: ever follow the dictates of justice. Profoundly engrave on your hearts the recollection of the passion of Jesus Christ, and you shall receive great consolation in the time of adversity."

XIV.

One day, after receiving Communion, in presence of some devout persons, he retired to make his thanksgiving in a corner of the chapel, and was carried away in spirit, remaining a long time without sense. The bystanders remarked it, and one of them asked him a question, but received no answer. At last the saint awoke from this favoured sleep, and, heaving a deep sigh, deplored the coldness of Christians with regard to this august sacrament, in which they receive the bread of the strong, containing in itself all kinds of delights. As his term was approaching, the heroic virtues of the saint were increasing, and his pure soul reflected with new splendour the image of Jesus Christ. At last the hour prefixed by the Lord arrived. Despite his austere life and his twenty years' fast, he had always enjoyed good health; but eight days before his death he was attacked by a painful illness, which presaged the term of his mortal career. At the first notice of his sickness his whole family flocked to the patient's side to attend him in his last moments. In the midst of the most acute pains Nicholas enjoyed unalterable peace. The love of suffering for Jesus turned into delights his privations and bitterness. When some of his relations expressed compassion for his pains, he answered: "What is this compared to what our Saviour endured?"

“O Jesus!” he sometimes exclaimed, “give me patience to suffer for Thee. Receive the sacrifice of my life, and have mercy on me.” When asked by his son Nicholas, now a worthy priest, if he entertained any feeling of resentment against those who had offended or injured him, he said he never thought of them except to recommend them to God, and that he hoped to die like a true follower of Him who pardoned his executioners on the cross. The priest of Estantz flew also to the side of his friend as soon as he heard the news of his illness. When he arrived he found him surrounded by his wife and children. “My children,” he said to them, “great as may be the sufferings of one in his agony, more terrible still is it, believe me, to fall into the hands of the living God. Labour, then, to so regulate your life and conduct that you may be able to present yourselves before the Supreme Judge, not in terror and dread, but with joyful and serene mind. Death, in the eyes of a good Christian, is no more than the end of his exile and the beginning of his happiness.”

He made a general confession of his whole life, and then earnestly begged for the holy Viaticum. At sight of his beloved Jesus he opened his arms, full of consolation; and he was going to say something, but his weakness and love prevented him. After receiving the bread of angels, and being anointed with the oil of the dying, he felt some relief. He modestly stretched himself and continued his prayers till his voice was hushed in his agony. Then he took his wife's and his children's hands, and, putting them on his heart, bade them farewell with expressive looks. Then he took that of the priest and kissed it; and finally pressing the crucifix to his breast, and kissing it with ineffable devotion, uttered three times the sweet name of Jesus, raised his eyes to heaven, and expired in the arms of his companion Ulrich, who never left him during his illness.

As soon as the news of the saint's death spread, mourning and consternation were depicted on the countenances of all. Every Swiss bewailed the death of his loving father. The solitude of Raufft witnessed the glorious triumph of virtue and reconciliation. All the neighbouring villages, with their priests and ecclesiastics, hastened to form part of the funeral cortege of the precious remains of the deceased. His sacred body was buried with great magnificence, and God wrought numerous miracles at his grave. He died, as the Lord had foretold him, on the 21st of March, 1427. On the day after the funeral Nicholas appeared to his wife and to other inhabitants of Saxeln, not as a worn-out old man, pale, fleshless, reduced by toil and breathing penance, but as a youth emitting rays of light and with a white banner in his hand, the symbol of his innocence.

In 1510 they exhumed his relics and placed them in a magnificent tomb. Finally, in view of the authenticity of his miracles, and after a serious examination of his heroic virtues, Pope Clement IX. allowed a Mass and Office in honour of the venerable Nicholas, and Clement X. inscribed the name of the saintly hermit on the catalogue of the beatified.



ST. MENIGNIUS, FULLER.

IN Misia, between Cicicus and Lampsacus on the sea of Marmora, there was an ancient city called Paros, where our saint lived and gained the crown of martyrdom. When Decius mounted the throne over the dead bodies of Philip and his son, assassinated by the troops, he raised so terrible a persecution against the inoffensive and defenceless Christians, that, according to the expression of St. Dionysius of Alexandria, one would imagine that the fulfilment of our Saviour's prophecy

regarding the fearful events to precede the end of the world was about taking place. The benign providence of the Lord permitted these bitter tribulations for the purpose of purifying and restoring faith and charity, arms which, in the idleness of peace, had become rusted in the minds of many Christians.

This poor labourer of ours was a married man, but a fervent Christian, and knew how to reconcile in the office of fuller the love of labour with piety to God and mercy to his neighbour. Finding himself at liberty, whether from the obscurity of his position or his love of retirement, whilst others were dragging their heavy chains and weaving their crown of glory in dark prisons, our fuller employed his leisure in visiting the prisons without fear of the danger, and consoling and assisting, according to his means, the persecuted of Jesus Christ. The saint passed a considerable part of the day in fulling cloth by the strength of arm, as was then the custom, and with his sweat mingled his tears for those who showed weakness in the faith. Not satisfied with employing his limited savings for the benefit of his afflicted brethren, and envious in a holy way of the glorious fate of the martyrs, he constantly besought the Lord to grant him grace also to shed his blood in defence of the faith he swore to in baptism; and the benign Lord heard the prayer of the fervent fuller.

One night the prisoners in the jail, some through dread of their own want of constancy in the atrocious torments, and some that the omnipotence of the God whom they adored might be manifested, unanimously appealed to the throne of the Most High in the following supplication: "O Lord! King of heaven, who, without noise or tumult, didst liberate Peter, the prince of the apostles, from prison, and sent thy angel to break his chains and restore him to liberty, send us Thy powerful aid and free us from these irons and this jail, and let

Thy enemies, who despise Thy name, know that Thou alone art the omnipotent God and the Sovereign Governor of the universe." They had scarcely finished their prayer when a bright light dissipated the darkness and transformed the prison into a heaven. It was Christ Jesus, who, having propitiously heard that prayer, emitted those rays. "Courage, my children," He said, "I am with you." At His words the chains fell broken from their feet, and the doors of the prison were opened wide. "Go," said Jesus, "and preach through the world the power of my omnipotent arm;" and all went out without the least obstruction. The guards and sentinels saw nothing of this, and hence, when they found the prison empty in the morning, their wonder was great, as they were confident the precautions they took were quite sufficient. Soon the news of the strange event spread through the town, and it was publicly announced that Jesus of Nazareth had appeared at night to the prisoners and set them free. The story reached Menignius as he was fulling cloth on the river bank. He could scarcely contain himself for joy at the triumph of the Saviour over the emissaries of hell, when he clearly heard a mysterious voice, which said to him: "Come, Menignius, I want to crown you with glory and give you eternal happiness." This voice, being repeated a second and third time, the saint understood that the Lord had accepted his desires, and was calling him to the combat to give him the palm of martyrdom. Convinced of the truth of the inspiration, he threw down his implements and went home to prepare himself for the contest by penance and prayer.

II.

At the end of a few days the sanguinary prætor came, resolved to have vengeance for the apparent outrage, and to water the streets with Christian blood, even to the

extirpation of Catholicity. Having published his impious edicts, he commanded that the instruments of torture should be prepared and exposed in public, as it were, challenging the Christians to defend their doctrine. The maxims of Jesus have ever infused heroism and true nobility into well-formed minds, even though they be of humble condition and lowly position in the eyes of mortals. All trades and professions are suited for sanctity, when followed according to the principles of the Gospel. And so our saintly fuller, despising all human respect, trampling on the glory of the world, full of holy zeal in the cause of faith, animated by sentiments more noble and generous than the false wisdom of the world can communicate, after pulling down the public edicts, presented himself before the judge and accused him of his iniquitous proceedings against the disciples of the Crucified. He takes the sanguinary decree of the emperor, and, in his very presence, tears it in pieces and tramples on it. The prætor's attendants, at sight of this liberty, threw him to the ground, and, after kicking him, cruelly scourged him. Then the judge rose up and said to the valiant athlete, now almost dead from the blows and the wounds he received: "Wretch, how dare you do such a thing in my presence?" "I did it for Jesus." "Take away the madman," said the judge, "and torture him without compassion. We shall see if Christ comes to save him." Those hyenas complied with this order so faithfully that they did not stop till they tore the flesh from his very entrails. The prætor mocked the invincible confessor, and blasphemed Jesus on seeing the glorious fuller so cruelly tormented; but the valorous soldier of the faith, with serene mind, remained constant, and suffered all with the hope of the immortal crown, which he now almost touched with his hand. A short pain is an eternal gain! Who would not willingly suffer all to secure a reward so in-

estimable? These thoughts made him answer the tyrant with Christian liberty and modesty, and tell him that there is a supreme tribunal before which judges and juries must appear to give an account of their actions.

The president, furious at seeing his self-respect mortified by a common but unconquerable labourer, said to the executioners: "Cut those fingers in pieces, with which he dared to tear the divine emperor's decree." Those wild beasts, thirsting for blood, did not wait to be told a second time; and the saint suffered this cruel torment with placid, patient, and joyful countenance, because considered worthy to give that proof of love and fidelity to his Divine Captain. When the barbarous order was executed, the judge ordered him to be sent back to prison that the tortures might be renewed next day. When again presented before the tribunal, the judge was ashamed to see a poor fuller more ready to suffer than he was able to devise torments to punish him. Exasperated to madness when he found the athlete firm as a rock when there was question of denying Jesus Christ, he ordered his head to be publicly cut off as a warning to the Christians. The wretch knew not that the blood of martyrs is a fruitful seed, from which new and invincible disciples of the Crucified spring. A numerous concourse, among whom was his afflicted wife, turned into a sea of tears for the loss of so loving and industrious a husband, followed him to his execution. When they arrived at the place, the invincible martyr, before presenting his head to the executioner, exhorted the spectators to embrace the Catholic faith, the only one which could make them truly happy in this life and in the next; and after recommending his wife to the charity of the Christians, he bowed his head to receive the fatal blow. A portentous marvel came to confirm the fuller's innocence, and the excellence of the religion he professed. When his head fell, separated from his body, a beautiful white dove

flew out of his mouth towards heaven in sight of the public, and the people in wonder exclaimed:—"Great and omnipotent is the God of Menignius." The prætor was alarmed when he heard of the effect produced on the crowd by the glorious athlete's death; but, hardened in his wickedness, he ordered the sacred remains to be guarded, in order to withdraw them from the veneration of the faithful. But in vain, for the Lord wished to glorify his servant in his relics, and no power avails against God. By divine disposition the guards went to sleep, and the watchful Christians collected the sacred deposit and took it away to serve as an encouragement and example to others.



ST. ZITA, SERVANT.

I.

ABOUT the middle of the thirteenth century there lived a young girl named Zita, which in the language of her time and country means Virgin, who by her heroic virtues merited the honours of our altars. She was born in Monsegradi, a little village about eight leagues from Lucca, in Italy. Her parents, John Lombard and Bonissima, were poor, but very rich in virtues, who at the proper time knew how to infuse the fear of God into their daughter's tender mind. To induce her to do or to avoid anything it was enough to say to her: "God wishes it; this is the will of God; that other is displeasing to his Divine Majesty." It appeared to her impossible that there could be creatures so blinded by passion, that knowing, on one hand, that sin was a rebellion against the most powerful and loving Father, against the wisest and most beneficent Friend, against the greatest and most humane King, against a God infinite in all His attributes; and on the other the horror of

those eternal flames with which sin is punished, wherever it is met with, whether in the highest angels or in man previously enriched with all the gifts of grace, that they would dare to commit it with such ease, and for motives so slight. With such a disposition and training, she so advanced in piety, modesty, and sweetness, that she was the charm of all who knew her. She spoke little, laboured much, and went about her business with great recollection, anxious to please God in every step she took. She had an uncle named Graciano, and a sister a nun, named Margaret, who both died in the odour of sanctity; but Zita outpaced them in the path of Christian perfection.

At the age of twelve she entered the service of a gentleman of Lucca, named Fatinelli, who lived near the church of St. Fridian, and whose family existed up to the end of the last century. In this humble state of servant Zita found a powerful means during the fifty years or so she remained in it of sanctifying her soul, and growing daily in virtue. It is true her Christian master and mistress looked on their servants as members of their family, for whose conduct they should give a strict account to the Lord, who confided them to their care; but it is no less so that she, faithfully corresponding to these views, considered her occupation as an honourable employment, to which the King of Glory had destined her, and that she took the privations it entailed as a penance for her sins, or as a powerful means of imitating Jesus Christ.

She was well known for her ardent charity. She tenderly loved the poor, as beloved brethren and heirs of Jesus Christ. Her slight savings and all she received from others was for them. She willingly became god-mother to all neglected children, and treated them like the tenderest mother, assisting them by every means in her power. Let no one imagine, however, that Zita in all this neglected her own duties; she looked on their

fulfilment as an act of justice and the express will of God. Consequently her first care was to please her master and mistress, and to do promptly and willingly whatever they commanded : honouring them, not so much to gain their praise, or acquire the character of a good servant, as because she regarded them as the representatives of Jesus Christ on earth, she looked on it as a happiness to obey their slightest hint, because it was the will of God, whom she sought in all her works. She was mild as a lamb, simple as a dove, humble as a violet. She served all with Christian sweetness, and never felt she was doing anyone a favour. If by chance it happened that she gave offence to any member of the family, she immediately went on her knees before the one offended, and humbly begged pardon.

II.

God, to prove His servant, allowed her to be persecuted, and her intentions wrongly interpreted. Her modesty was taken for stupidity, her punctuality in her duties was looked on as the fruit of refined pride, her piety as exquisite hypocrisy. Black envy, which, like hidden fire, burns and consumes ignoble hearts, had taken possession of the breast of another servant, and allowed her not to look justly on Zita, who by her virtues had gained the affection of her employers. So she availed herself of every occasion to calumniate and blacken the saint, and excite against her doubts and want of confidence. If anything were lost, or went astray, Zita must have made away with it to have something to give to the poor. If any command had not been duly fulfilled it was Zita's carelessness or malice prevented it. If anything turned out well to the master's satisfaction it was because Zita had no hand in it. All the bad things were due to Zita : Zita did nothing right nor as it should be.

And so even her employers formed wrong judgments about the innocent virgin, and not seldom caused her suffering. She got from them cross faces, harsh words, bitter rebukes, severe threats; and from the servants mockery and heartless sarcasm. But the saint, though she suffered keenly, did not lose heart. Always even-tempered and resigned, she bore all as arranged by Divine Providence, without complaining to anyone but God, without resenting anything, but ever desirous of imitating her Divine Master, who died the victim of persecution and calumny. In the end her humility, her moderation, her piety, and her exactness in her duties triumphed over all talk and slander, and regained for her the estimation of all who knew her. She, however, conducted herself as usual, and wondered she should receive praise when she believed she only deserved reproof. This very humility made her avail herself of every moment of her time. Every hour she could save from her ordinary duties she employed in good works. Above all, she visited the sick poor, consoled them with the greatest tenderness, and depriving her own mouth of it, brought them some little kindness, which she knew they would like. She took particular pains with the very author of her troubles. Solicitous and tender, she cared her as if she had been her most faithful and dearest friend. In a sea of trouble and tears, the sick girl, in presence of Zita and her mistress, acknowledged her injustice and made public retractation of her calumnies. "Ah, my mistress," she exclaimed, "Zita, is an angel, and I have been her enemy. Envy and jealousy blinded me and I caluminated her." The saint had prostrated herself at the foot of the bed, praying for the dying woman, who in a few moments was to stand before the divine tribunal. Her prayers, perhaps hastened her eternal glory. By such conduct she daily secured the good will of her employers more and more, and

gained new strength to assist the poor and the sick. More than once, too, the Lord showed by prodigies how much He was pleased by the saintly servant's generosity. On a certain occasion a pilgrim, burning with heat and thirst, asked her for an alms. The afflicted servant had absolutely nothing, having already distributed all she possessed, and she was filled with sadness at not being able to relieve the poor of Jesus Christ. As if something suddenly occurred to her, she told him to wait a little. She went for a glass of water, and making the sign of the cross over it, gave it to the thirsty pilgrim. Prodigy of God! The water was converted into wine so good, that the poor man gratefully said he never had tasted so delicious a drink in all his life. From this and other like portents, which soon became divulged through the people in whose favour they were wrought, her employers put still more confidence in her, and distributed through her hands their customary alms. And the poor who called at Fatinelli's door always asked for Zita; and she, the more jovial and content the greater their number, received all with marks of maternal tenderness. If with her allowance she had not sufficient to satisfy all, she consoled them with words full of mercy, told them to return to-morrow, and prayed God to move the heart of someone to relieve them in the meantime. She was not content with this. All the presents she got, and sometimes even her own dinner, served to supply the wants of some unfortunate, or to relieve some sick person, she herself fasting. Besides, as a gentleman's servant, she might have slept on a good bed; but she would yield it to some poor woman, and sleep herself on the floor, or on a bare plank. She took particular pains with women of bad life, and tried every means to show them the evil of their way, and looked on her care as well paid if even for a time she could withdraw them from their evil courses. Every misery, corporal as well

as spiritual, transpierced her heart, and left her no peace till she did all she could to remedy it.

III.

A sad echo resounded in her heart when she heard the bell ring for the execution of some prisoner condemned to death. At the first sound poor Zita could not restrain her tears; and day or night, whilst the preparation of the criminal for his fearful passage continued, she ceased not to pray for the eternal salvation of the poor wretch. And this sentiment was renewed to a certain degree whenever she heard of any misfortune, or knew that some sinner was in the agony of death. "Succour him, O Lord," she would exclaim; "have compassion on the poor dying man! Make him penitent! Free him from the attacks of the enemy!" It is impossible to tell how much she was interested in the conversion of unhappy sinners. To see Jesus offended, and souls, redeemed by His Precious Blood, contaminated by sin, transfixed her heart like a two-edged sword.

The good servant, so humble, so submissive, so condescending, so sweet with all, assumed extraordinary authority and fortitude whenever there was question of preventing offences to God or restraining liberties. One of the servants of the house, blinded by passion, attempted once to stain the virginal purity of the saint; but she, like an eagle struggling to free her little ones from aggressive hands, tore his face with her nails, and would sooner take his life than yield. She loved purity more than the pupils of her eyes. To preserve this rich treasure, so begrudged to us by our enemies, to continual prayer she united fasting, and above all, the mortification of her senses and passions. Never was she seen at those diversions, in which innocence runs so much danger,

nor in those places frequented by foolish and immodest persons. Careful and solicitous for the preservation of the virginal virtue, she avoided everything that could stain a flower so delicate. Prayer was the dew with which she preserved it fresh, the food with which she nourished it. She often went at midnight to Matins, or got up at this hour to meditate, and remained alone in the church to continue her prayers. She attended daily at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with such reverence and fervour that she excited devotion in all who saw her. Always on her knees, with her eyes fixed on heaven, attentive to the august ceremonies, she contemplated her beloved Jesus as if she were witnessing His death on Calvary, and watered the pavement with her tears. The Lord often favoured her with extraordinary consolations. Lost to sense in them, carried away in spirit, and surrounded sometimes with an aureola of light, she appeared rather to live among the angelic choirs than mortal men. She usually returned home very early, so that when her employers got up they found everything clean and in order.

IV.

Yet it happened one day that, buried in her prayers, when day broke, she had completely forgotten to bake bread for the house, as she should have done. When she thought of it she got up and went home, fretting lest she should not have time to do it. When she arrived she found the flour kneaded and the loaves formed ready to be put in the oven. The servant, thinking it was her mistress who did it, went to thank her; but the mistress was astonished, and inquiring into the matter, found that no mortal could have put a hand to the business, and her esteem for her servant was thereby increased. One Christmas night, when it was very cold,

Zita was preparing to go to Matins and midnight Mass. When her master saw her he said: "Where are you going, child, in such cold, from which we can scarcely protect ourselves, with all our clothing? How can you bear it after your rigorous fasts, so poorly clad, and having to remain so long on the frozen marble? Better for you to stay at home, where you can quietly mind your prayers. But if you will go, at least take a cloak with you to protect you from the inclemency of the night." Unable to resist her devotion, which urged her not to neglect so great a solemnity, Zita took the cloak her master mentioned, and went. When leaving, her master said to her: "Zita, take care not to lend the cloak to anyone, for if you lose it you may be prepared for a good scolding." The servant of God answered: "Don't fear, sir, with God's help the cloak will come home all right." When she reached the church she saw near her a poor man half naked and shivering with cold. This was enough to move her to compassion, and turning to the beggar she said: "What ails you, brother? What makes you weep?" The poor man, looking at her, silently signified his nakedness. Then the good woman instinctively taking the cloak from her shoulders, reached it to him saying: "Take this, brother, and cover yourself till Mass is over. Don't leave from where you are, and then I will take you home and make a fire to warm you." Without another word Zita went to her accustomed place and became absorbed in prayer as usual. When the divine offices were over, and almost the whole congregation had gone home, the devout servant of God went to look for the poor man; but he had disappeared, and after searching in all directions she could find him neither without nor within the church. "What has become of him?" said the saint to herself. "Perhaps they robbed him of the cloak and he is ashamed to show himself to me. His modest and devout appearance lead

me to think he did not make off with it. Maybe he lost it in the crush, poor fellow." And thus she piously tried to excuse the beggar: for it is the part of the faithful followers of Jesus Christ not to think ill of anyone, and to excuse their neighbour's intention when his actions are not deserving of praise. At last, having failed in her search, she hurried home, trusting that God would appease her master's indignation, justly excited by her carelessness, or inspire the person who had it to return the cloak. When her master saw her enter the house without the garment, as he had feared, he flew into a passion, and scolded her without measure, all which the saint bore in silence and Christian submission. When obliged, but not to excuse herself, she simply told what had happened, without adding to or taking from it, for she hated a lie as a fault disagreeable to God. She endeavoured, however, to give him hopes that the Lord would not permit the loss of that which was given through pure compassion and charity.

The master, who knew the singular providence which the Almighty employed towards the charitable servant, did not altogether despair of recovering his cloak; but that did not prevent him from showing his anger to Zita, the Lord so permitting, to prove the virtue of his beloved follower. And in fact, at three o'clock in the evening, a poor man of venerable and enchanting appearance called at Fatinelli's house with the cloak on his arm. The master went out after Zita to see who it was, and he saw the poor man give the cloak to the servant, thanking her for her charity. Both he and Zita were going to speak to him, but he suddenly disappeared in a flash of celestial light, leaving both master and servant inundated with inexplicable consolation.

V.

This servant of the Lord, who, with such solicitude clothed and fed Jesus Christ in his poor, not only avoided foolish adornments calculated to foster vice in the heart, but always dressed poorly and went barefooted, and in all things showed herself the humble slave of Jesus, who made Himself poor for our sake. It was a maxim of hers that "it is not rich dress and dainty food that open to us the gates of heaven, but mortification and Christian charity." She thought so little of all the things of this world that she distributed her own poor salary among the needy. She drew this self-denial and charity from meditation on the sufferings of Jesus. She was very devout to His passion, the recollection of which inflamed her so in the fire of divine love, that she burst into loving sighs, ardent tears, and tender colloquies. It was enough for her to see the image of Christ crucified, to bewail bitterly the ingratitude of men towards so loving a brother, who did not hesitate to give his life for us. She daily went over the different steps of that sanguinary tragedy, to the no slight consolation of her soul and her advancement in perfection. About six miles from the city there was a temple dedicated to the holy angels. Thither Zita went every Friday in honour of her beloved Jesus, and neither rain nor tempest could prevent her making this sacrifice. One day that she was very busy she could not go till night-fall. A gentleman met her on the road, and said: "Whither are you going, foolish woman, at such an hour? Don't you see night will soon catch you, and you may lose your way?" "Go your own," said the saint; "and I hope God will lead me right." The gentleman spurred his horse and went at a gallop to St. Angelo, where the said church

was. When passing it he found Zita on her knees before the door praying with great fervour and modesty. The gentleman, in wonder, asked her how she arrived so quick. And she answered (with Job): "that as God willed, so it was." Zita fostered the divine flame which burned in her breast by frequent and fervent ejaculations, which, day and night, at home and abroad, at work and at rest, alone and in company, she addressed to Jesus.

She was no less devout to the Blessed Virgin, the channel through which all graces come to us. She felt such love, confidence, and reverence for the Mother of Divine Love, that she venerated the sweet name of Mary in whoever bore it, regarding her with special affection and veneration. She visited with singular devotion the churches dedicated to Our Lady, and kept her feasts with great fervour. Nor did our sovereign Queen forget to reward this devotion by special favours, even in this world. Returning one day fasting from visiting a church of St. James and another of St. Peter, near Pisa, night overtook her on the road when far from home. In vain did several people ask her to spend it with them: she continued her walk in order to be home on the following day. At cock-crow she felt faint from weariness and fasting, and sat down near a well on the road. She went to cool her face with a little water, when a venerable matron appeared to her more beautiful than an angel, and invited her to accompany her to the city. Zita felt in her presence new strength to continue her journey, and, without hesitation, said: "Let us go, with the blessing of God." They started together, and when they arrived the gates of the bridge of the city opened and allowed them free passage. When they entered the city and arrived at her door, she turned to thank the stranger and ask her to go in, but found, to her surprise and satisfaction, that she had disappeared.

VI.

This tender devotion to Jesus and Mary was not sterile in our saint, but engendered heroic virtues in her soul. Through it she had arrived at such a high degree of humility that, entirely dead to the world and herself, she never answered with harshness, much less with indignation, those who insulted, cursed, or injured her, nor lost her habitual calm and holy joy when molested or persecuted without reason or justice. This same humility moved her not only to hide, as far as possible, the extraordinary favours she received from God, but also to employ herself in the lowliest and most repugnant duties of the house, and endeavour to have herself looked down on and despised. To preserve this treasure and increase it, she frequently approached the tribunal of penance, and bewailed with such bitter tears the slightest imperfections, that she infused compunction and repentance into all. With a heart so pure and adorned with so many virtues, what graces did she not receive on approaching the divine banquet, on receiving that Divine Spouse, the only master of her heart! Her burning countenance, her streaming eyes, indicated to the bystanders that her ardent soul was melting in the fire of divine love.

When Zita reached an advanced age, her employers no longer wished to consider her as a servant, but as a child of the house, leaving her entirely free to occupy herself as she desired. But Zita, who was a great lover of poverty, never availed herself of this liberty except to pay more attention to the poor and spend more time at her devotions and penances; for, as regards the service of the house, she never allowed her age or infirmities to dispense her from her duties.

On Wednesday, the 27th of April, 1272, a bright star appeared above Lucca, whose brilliant rays were

not eclipsed by those of the sun at mid-day. At sight of this extraordinary phenomenon, witnessed by all the inhabitants of the town, the children ran through the streets shouting, as if inspired: "Come to the church of St. Fridian, for Zita, the saint, has died." And in fact our holy servant had expired at that very hour. After five days of low fever, surrounded by some devout women who had attended her, and fortified by the holy sacraments of the Church, the aged virgin placidly closed her eyes, and her soul went to receive the crown of glory at the age of nearly sixty years. The noble family of Fatinelli buried her according to her rank. The church where the ceremony was to take place was crowded with people of all classes and conditions. The approaches by streets and squares through which the funeral should pass were equally thronged, and all wished to touch the body and carry away some relic. Numerous miracles increased the people's devotion for the humble servant. The dumb spoke, the blind saw, the deaf heard, all the afflicted found relief in the protection of the saint. At last the sacred remains were interred in a stone coffin, from which, after a few days, a sweet liquor oozed, which miraculously cured all kinds of maladies. A hundred and fifty miracles wrought by it were juridically established, and are a proof of the sanctity which may be reached by persons of the humblest class and profession by fulfilling their duty, and by a faithful correspondence to the inspirations of grace. Her body was found entire and incorrupt three hundred years after her death, in the year 1580, and is preserved with great veneration in the church of St. Fridian. Pope Leo X. approved of an office composed in honour of St. Zita, and Innocent XII., in 1696, published the decree of her beatification, and confirmed the devotion paid to her from almost the time of her death.



Reading from the *History of the Holy Family.*

FROM THE BAPTISM OF JESUS TO HIS EX-
PULSION OF THE SELLERS FROM THE
TEMPLE.

LET us return to Jesus: He was on the borders of thirty years, an age before which, among the Jews, it was forbidden to assume the office of priest, prophet, or master, when He assisted at the last moments of His putative father. Some time before, John, the son of Zachary, who had reached the same age, leaving the desert, where he had lived on locusts and wild honey, appeared on the banks of the Jordan preaching penance. He was dressed in a coarse camel skin; but such was his edifying life, so holy the maxims he taught, that he attracted crowds from all the neighbouring districts, who abandoned their home and ran to hear his preaching, and receive the baptism of penance. He condemned presumption and hypocrisy, he anathematised ambition and avarice, he thundered against lust and idleness, and, with ardent zeal, he recommended charity to the poor. The people, astonished at hearing such pure and sound teaching, believed—at least not a few—that John was the expected Messiah; but the holy precursor undeceived them, saying: “I, indeed, baptise you with water; but there shall come one mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to loose.

He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and He will purge his floor; and will gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." Thus did he prophesy to them the terrible Day of Judgment.

But as the people kept up the rumour that John was the Desired of nations, the Jews sent some priests and Levites to the banks of the Jordan to find out what foundation there was for all this talk. When these commissioners arrived, they asked the precursor: "Who art thou?" And he answered: "I am not the Christ?" And they said: "What then? Art thou Elias?" And he said: "I am not." "Art thou the prophet?" And he answered: "No." and then they asked farther: "Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us?" And he replied: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord." "Then," said they, "why dost thou baptise, if thou be not Christ, nor Elias, nor the prophet?" And his answer was: "I baptise with water; but there has stood One in the midst of you, whom you know not." And he gave them to understand that He was the Messias.

In those days, after bidding good bye to His Blessed Mother, and getting her blessing, Jesus also left Nazareth to go to be baptised by His precursor. As soon as the Baptist recognised the Saviour of the world standing among sinners, he was filled with holy dread and profound respect; and when he heard Jesus asking for baptism like another, he said, in all humility: "I ought to be baptised by Thee, and comest Thou to me?" And Jesus answered: "Suffer it to be so now. For so it becometh us to fulfil all justice." John bowed to the humiliation of Jesus Christ, in order that it might serve as an antidote to human pride. And when the Lord came out of the water, after He received baptism. He

prostrated Himself to give thanks to His Eternal Father. And suddenly the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon Jesus in form of a dove, and a mysterious voice came from the clouds, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." After this palpable evidence, John no longer entertained the slightest doubt that Jesus was the Messiah.

When this edifying ceremony was over, the Saviour was conducted by the Spirit to the desert, to struggle with the Prince of Darkness. There He dwelt in the most complete solitude for the space of forty days, without other companionship than that of the beasts which roamed about. And, as He never tasted food all this time, at the end He felt the pangs of hunger. The infernal dragon, who goes about seeking whom he may devour and eternally destroy, availed himself of these circumstances, and, approaching Jesus, tempted Him, saying: "If Thou be the Son of God, say to this stone that it be made bread." The Lord, both in order to repel the enemy and to give us a lesson in the great confidence we should ever have in Divine Providence, humbly replied: "It is written that 'man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" Man, endowed with a rational soul, a living spark of the Divinity, has much greater need of the bread of the spirit, which is the word of God, than of the material bread with which he nourishes his body. As the latter, when deprived of due sustenance, hurries rapidly to death: so the former, without truth and virtue, which engender in it the meditation of the divine law, languishes and sinks into eternal ruin. When the devil found himself baffled, he took occasion from his very defeat to return to the charge. He tried to tempt Jesus now through vanity and presumptuous confidence, and, taking Him to a pinnacle of the temple of Jerusalem, said to Him: "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself from hence, for it

is written that 'He hath given His angels charge over Thee, that they keep thee, and that in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest Thou dash Thy foot against a stone.'" But Jesus immediately answered him: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." This was an answer full of celestial wisdom, which teaches us, that though we should place unbounded confidence in the love and omnipotence of God our Father, we should not presumptuously expect Him to aid us by miraculous means when we can obtain our end by our own labour and industry.

The capital enemy of the human race did not yet give in, but redoubling his efforts, and again attacking Him whom he desireth to involve in his meshes, he carried Him to the top of a mountain, and, pointing out to Him all the glory and power of the kingdoms of the earth, said to Him: 'To Thee will I give all this power and the glory of them, for to me they are delivered, and to whom I will I give them. If Thou, therefore, wilt adore before me, all shall be Thine.'" Such is the longing the devil has for the destruction of one single soul, that he would give the whole world to make it his own. "Get behind me, Satan," Christ responded, "for it is written: 'Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'" To serve God is to reign. And what is the whole world if one does not serve God, since all the goods of earth cannot satisfy the heart created for God alone? Then the devil departed, filled with shame at his defeat, and instantly angels came to Christ and ministered to Him. Ah! with what pleasure they served their Divine Monarch.

When this rigorous Lenten fast was concluded the Lord entered on His evangelical labours, taking, as His assistants, not the wise and powerful of the earth, but most of them simple and humble fishermen. John had gone to baptise in Bethania, beyond the Jordan, and,

seeing Jesus, who happened to pass by there, he said to two of his disciples: "Behold the Lamb of God; behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world. This is He of whom I said: 'After me there cometh a man, who is preferred before me: because He was before me. And I knew Him not, but that He may be made manifest in Israel; therefore am I come, baptising with water.'" Yes, Jesus, being God, was eternal, and, consequently, anterior to the Baptist, although, as man, He was his contemporary. John lost no opportunity of proclaiming the dignity of Jesus. And so, on the present occasion, he told them that in one of his visions he had seen the Holy Ghost descend on Jesus in form of a dove and rest on Him, according to the sign the Eternal had given him in order to distinguish Him. When the two disciples had heard these wonderful encomiums they followed Jesus, anxious to speak to Him. The Messiah turned, as if He did not know their intention, and, seeing them following Him, asked: "What seek you?" And they answered: "Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master) where dwellest Thou?" He said to them: "Come and see." Jesus took them with Him, and they passed nearly the whole day with Him. Andrew was so struck by the gentle manners and the wisdom of Jesus Christ, that the moment he met his brother Simon, he told him the whole incident, and, though it was after dark, hurried him off to pay our Lord a visit. Jesus saluted the new disciple in the following words: "Thou art Simon, the son of John; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is interpreted Peter." And thenceforth He chose him as the firm rock on which to build His Church. The following day He set out for Nazareth, accompanied by Andrew and Simon Peter, and another disciple who had gone with them to see Him, whom some believe to have been Bartholomew, or James the son of Zebedee. On the way they met with Philip, who, when

Jesus invited him to join them, immediately left all to follow Him. In this way, by supernatural and divine calls, was Jesus gathering around Him those who should preach his doctrine through the universe, and seal with their blood His regenerating maxims. Twelve was the number of the Apostles selected for this glorious enterprise, and their names were: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alpheus, Simon, Jude brother of James, and Judas Iscariot.

When Philip was admitted into the company of Jesus, he could not contain himself for joy, and hence, when he met, a little after his election, with Nathanael, he told him that they had found the Messiah, and that He was Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael answered: "Can anything of good come from Nazareth?" "Come," said Philip, "and see." They both went, and when Jesus saw Nathanael, He exclaimed: "Behold an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no guile." And then Nathanael remarked, with surprise: "Whence knowest thou me?" Jesus answered: "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." Some writers suppose that Nathanael was then praying God for the grace to see and know the promised Messiah. But, prescinding from that, the good Israelite, naturally astonished at seeing that Jesus penetrated things which he could not humanly know, uttered these feeling words: "Behold, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." Jesus answered: "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, thou believest: greater things than these shalt thou see. . . . Amen, amen I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man," that is on the last day, when He comes to judge the living and the dead. Our Lord often called Himself the Son of Man,

to indicate His human nature, as He does here to Nathanael, whom some believe, with a fair amount of probability, to have been St. Bartholomew.

Proofs were not wanting to strengthen the faith of this docile Jew in the divinity of Jesus Christ, not the least of them being what occurred shortly after this interview. There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, to which Mary and Jesus, with His disciples, had been invited. Jesus did not refuse to attend, thus foreshadowing by His presence the sacramental dignity to which He desired to elevate marriage. The feast was conducted with innocent rejoicing, as also singular modesty, as became the guest who presided at it; but unexpectedly, whether from the large number of friends assembled, or from the poverty of the spouses, the wine ran short. The Virgin, taking pity on the poor people, looked at our Saviour, and said to Him: "They have no wine!" . . . Jesus understood His Mother's hint, and answered: "What is it to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come." Notwithstanding this answer, or rather apparent negative, Mary told the servants to do whatever Jesus should command. There happened to be there six water-pots of stone for the purifications of the Jews, each of which held two or three measures. Jesus ordered them to fill them with water, and when they were full, He said to the servants: "Draw out now, and carry (a little) to the chief steward of the feast." As the latter did not know what our Lord had done, he tasted the wine, and, calling the bridegroom, complained to him thus: "Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But thou hast kept the good wine until now." This was the first of the public miracles of Jesus Christ, and it confirmed the disciples in the idea they had already formed of our Lord; and it induces all Christians to fly to Mary for aid in all their necessities. What will not

that celestial and bountiful Lady do for those who implore her assistance, when, without being asked, she hastened with such generosity to the relief of these poor spouses? What favour can she deny to one who has a lasting and true devotion to her, when she thus interposes her maternal authority on behalf of people who, perhaps, were not aware of her dignity? Hence holy writers say that devotion to the Blessed Virgin is a sign of eternal predestination, and that not only no one was ever damned who, confiding in Mary, endeavoured to fight the enemies of his soul, availing himself of the assistance sure to be given by her who is truly the refuge of sinners, but that no one ever implored her patronage in his troubles, whether temporal or spiritual, without being heard by her.



ST. LIDUVINA.

LIGHT FROM THE LOWLY.

Series IV.

ST. BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE, BEGGAR.

I.

THE Lord raised up this pious beggar in the middle of the eighteenth century to confound and humble pride and condemn the effeminacy peculiar to those times, but which ours, unfortunately, have inherited. His conduct, at the same time that it gives us an undeniable proof of the life and fecundity of the Catholic Church, establishes to evidence that there is no state, no matter how lowly, incompatible with the practice of the evangelical counsels, or opposed to the acquisition of the most consummate sanctity.

This poor man was born the 26th March, 1748, in Ametti, a parish of the bishopric of Bologna, but at the present day belonging to the diocese of Arras, in France. His father, John Labre, and his mother, Anne Gramzire, both of the farming class, endeavoured to inspire him from his earliest years with a love of virtue and a horror of vice. Benedict Joseph with his keen intelligence, fair judgment, and felicitous memory, availed himself of all he heard from them about our august religion; and even at that tender age sought solitude and silence to

hear the voice of God, which spoke to his heart. When at play with other children, though noted for his liveliness and gaiety, he still displayed in his bearing a certain air of sedateness, sweetness, and modesty, which captivated all hearts. At home, in a little childish oratory he had a representation of the mysteries of the Holy Mass; and his greatest enjoyment was to entertain himself with these pious objects, in which his soul was already inflamed with the love of Jesus Christ. When sent to school, at the age of five years, he applied himself diligently, particularly to the study of the Christian doctrine. The child's good disposition induced his parents to send him, when twelve years old, to his uncle, Francis Labre, parish priest of Erin.

This good priest was vicar of Ametti when the child was born. It was he baptised him, and now with laudable zeal he took on himself his education. Soon he discovered the wonders of grace which the Lord had sowed in his young nephew, which made him prepare him immediately for his first Communion. Benedict also on his part disposed himself with edifying care. He made a general confession of his whole life, and then approached to receive the Bread of Angels with angelical fervour. When this religious duty was performed to the youth's ineffable consolation, he was sent to learn Latin at the parish school. His application, docility, modesty, sweetness, and fervour won for him the love of his uncle and master, and the appreciation and respect of his fellow-pupils. Here, with the perusal of the good books he found in his uncle's library, commenced that life of prayer, solitude, and disengagement from all creatures, which he preserved till his death. In these young years he observed all the fasts of the Church, he gave all he got to the poor, and daily reserved part of his dinner to secretly aid a poor woman. The reading of Father Le Jeune's sermons made such an impression on his heart that, terrified at the pains of the reprobate, and at the great

number of those who are lost, he resolved to leave no stone unturned, and to incessantly labour to free himself from those eternal flames. "If few are saved," he said to himself, "is it not madness to stand with one's arms folded, and not labour earnestly to be of the number of the few?" The labours undertaken by the most austere religious for their eternal salvation appeared to him light when he considered the evils from which they free them and the great good they secure. Hence he besought the Lord night and day to deign to point out to him the state most conducive to his salvation.

II.

After a year of prayers, tears, and consultations, abhorring the world before he knew its wickedness, he resolved to abandon it for ever and take refuge in La Trappe. He was then sixteen years of age. For the fulfilment of his aspirations he had to obtain the permission of his uncle and parents, and he asked them for it. The former at once acceded to the just desires and reasons of his nephew; but the latter, through a false love, which blinds many parents, firmly opposed his entrance into so austere an Order, believing he had not strength to bear such strict mortification, observe perpetual silence, and in his whole life taste nothing but badly cooked vegetables. Benedict, hoping that God would change his parents' will, remained at his fervent uncle's side, and continued his prayers and entreaties to the Lord to guide him in a matter of such importance.

In the meantime the hand of God made itself felt in the parish of Erin. A contagious disease decimated the population, and among other victims of charity was our holy youth's pious uncle. The good pastor, after spending his all in the relief of his flock, did not hesitate to sacrifice his life for them, by zealously attending those afflicted by the plague. Benedict, who in his own way had given a brilliant example of charity in these critical

circumstances, by consoling and assisting the sick, deeply felt this loss, and became more and more convinced of the instability of earthly things, and the madness of those who centre their happiness in them. He returned home and renewed his entreaties to be allowed to go to La Trappe, but met with the same resistance, particularly on the part of his mother. Lengthened was the combat he had to sustain, but his perseverance was victorious in the end. His parents became satisfied that such fervour and anxiety could only come from God, and gave him the permission and blessing he desired. The devout youth took to the road at once, and after a long and painful journey, when he now appeared to touch the term of his aspirations, he got from those religious a distinct refusal on account of his youth. Afflicted by this contradiction, but conforming to the divine will, he returned home to await a better opportunity of consummating the sacrifice.

A few days after his return they sent him to continue Latin in the house of his maternal uncle, Vincent, who was curate and schoolmaster of the parish of Couville. His leaning to a religious life, and above all to the Orders of great austerity and penance, increased daily by the frequenting of the Sacraments, continual prayer, and constant mortification. He returned to the charge, then, and asked to be admitted among the Carthusians of Montreuil, but was again refused on account of his age. This did not make him despair. Hearing that in Longerenesse they received young men, thither he went, and was admitted to the exercises of the novitiate. Benedict Joseph thought that he had been transported to Egypt or the desert of the Promised Land; but the Lord, who had only sent him to learn that way of life, and afterwards, prove that there is no evangelical counsel which may not be practised by those who live in the world, buried him in such an abyss of bitterness and desolation, that the superiors thought it prudent to send him home.

Not because he had to leave the cloister did he aban-

don the spirit he had learned in it in a few days. In the two years he lived with his parents, his penances yielded in nothing to those practised by the religious: his fasts were austere; short the sleep he took on hard boards; his prayer almost continual. His loving mother, alarmed at so penitent a life, qualified his austerities as indiscretion, and tried to put an end to their rigours. Benedict answered with submission and sweetness:—“God calls me to an austere life: it is right to try myself that I may better enter into the views of the Lord.” It was a maxim of his that we should have three hearts in one: the first pure, sincere, and holy, to love and serve God, and bear with patience the cross He may be pleased to impose on us; the second full of ardour, love, and generosity for the good of our neighbour, particularly for the conversion of sinners and the relief of the blessed souls in purgatory; and the last firm, severe, and strong against ourselves, that we may yield not the slightest satisfaction to our passions, but conceive a holy horror of the pleasures of the senses, and mortify and crucify the body in order to reign with Jesus Christ. The whole heart, or the three in one, should be mild, patient, and humble. With these principles no wonder he should resist the efforts of his own and others, remaining constant in the road he entered on. However, he had not at home the liberty he desired to torment his body: his own humility, the respect he had for his parents, the desire to avoid notice, restrained him, and hence he ardently desired to abandon his father’s house. When one day he was pressing his mother for leave to depart, and she refused, telling him that away from her he would not find means to live, Benedict answered:—“Let me go, mother mine. I will live on roots like the anchorites: surely, with God’s grace, we can live like them.” Despite all, he was always gay, complacent, and submissive, recognising in all the hand of God our loving Father. He was to his neighbours a model of fervour, but he edified them above all by the devotion

and frequency with which he received the holy sacraments. He was shocked to see how few availed themselves of penance, the tribunal of mercy, for which he prepared himself as if he were a great sinner. What he said on this point is worthy of consideration.

III.

Persuaded, like St. Teresa, that a great number of sinners are condemned through the effect of bad confessions, he used to say that he thought he saw three processions in different directions coming from this divine tribunal.

The first procession was composed of penitents, all clothed in white, pure as the lily, who took the straight road to heaven, whither they went immediately after death. This group was small in numbers, and was formed of those who, having omitted no means of making a good confession, endeavoured to satisfy the divine justice by prayer, fasting, works of mercy, and indulgences.

Those of the second procession, not numerous either, but more so than the other, were all dressed in purple, as a sign of their repentance, and were composed of those who were content with the dispositions necessary for the validity of the sacrament, but neglected to perform satisfactory works, or avail themselves of the treasures of indulgences which the Church liberally grants. All these when they died fell into purgatory to fully satisfy for their sins.

The third procession which left the tribunal of penance, inspired terror and dread. It was formed of a prodigious number of persons clothed all in black, to indicate the miserable state of their souls, striding with gigantic steps to their ruin, and falling like dry leaves into the flames of hell. These were the sacrilegious Christians, who through shame had concealed or palliated their sins in confession, or had confessed them without due sorrow or the resolution of amendment.

The servant of God, animated by these truths, did

all he could not to approach this sacrament of mercy through routine, but with lively desires of receiving pardon of his defects and of amending his imperfections. And he gathered corresponding fruit.

As the voice of God was constantly resounding in his heart, calling him to a still more austere life, he again insisted and besought, and ceased not till he obtained his parents' consent to his retirement from the world. And so, after three months' study of philosophy in Ligni, he returned, with their blessing, to seek admittance among the Carthusians of Montreuil. This institute, whose rigours and austerities might cow hearts passionately attached to penance, appeared to our youth a sweet and joyous retreat. But God did not want him here except to prove his constancy. Contemplating in the temple the gravity of the ancient ceremonies, the imposing majesty of so many religious dressed in white cloaks, the devout and measured singing of so many voices, and outside the profound silence as of the desert, the long corridors with their melancholy light, the countenances of the brothers respiring penance, the narrowness of the cells, image of the grave, one would think that a mind greedy of mortification and austerity would have been enchanted. But Labre, once admitted to the trials of the novitiate, was so pressed by interior sufferings, that he knew not one instant of consolation or joy. His body appeared to succumb under the weight of labour, watching, and fasts: his spirit found no pleasure in any of the exercises, and his soul, submerged in a sea of bitterness, ran to God for consolation, and God refused it. His desolation and dryness were so great, that though in continual prayer, he imagined that prayer became impossible; though burning in divine love, he thought he was buried in the ice of death. And in the midst of this agony he struggled to excite his fervour, and prostrate at the feet of the Father of mercies, he protested that he wished to serve and love Him as His most faithful servants, but nothing tranquillised him. When

the good religious saw the servant of God buried in these interior torments, they were convinced that the Lord was content with the desire of the sacrifice, which Benedict intended to offer Him, and told him he must renounce the project. After six weeks of hard trials he wrote to his parents :—" I wish to tell you that the Carthusians have not considered me suitable for their Order, and I left on the 2nd of October. I look on this disposition as an order of Providence, who calls me to a more perfect state. . . . I am going to La Trappe, so long and so often desired. I ask your pardon for all my acts of disobedience, and for all the annoyance I have caused you ; and I pray your blessing that God may accompany me." At the age of twenty-one he again asked to be admitted to La Trappe, and not succeeding, he went to the abbey of Sept-Fonts, in the diocese of Autun, a monastery celebrated for the austerity of the rule observed in it, He was received as a novice on the 28th of October, 1769, but was again submerged in his former desolation.

IV.

Considering, on one hand, that Sovereign Good, worthy of infinite love, and on the other his ingratitude, his worthlessness, his nothingness, Benedict Joseph never regarded himself as sufficiently humiliated and lowered in the divine presence. As a person who looks fixedly at the sun is blinded by his splendour, and appears to be in darkness without the power to distinguish objects except confusedly, so our penitent, by the abundance of divine light which inundated his soul, thought he was buried in the clouds of death. Surrounded by obscure night he could not perceive a ray of light which might bring the desired consolation to his soul. Yet these severe and terrible sufferings were not sufficient to make him halt a moment on his road. Fervent and observant, he was the model of a perfect religious ; and in the midst of that bitter desolation he made gigantic strides

in the way of the just. But God wished Benedict, or Urban, as he was called in the novitiate, to lead a solitary life in the midst of the world, as an example to other men, and sent him a serious illness, which determined his superiors to dismiss him, with a certificate of piety, obedience, and assiduity. He left in 1770, after eight months' novitiate.

And now we have him converted into a poor beggar, a state which, by the divine will, he was to preserve to the end of his days, though at first he tried to enter some other religious house. Soon, however, he renounced this intention. Led by the spirit of God, he resolved to visit the more celebrated sanctuaries to enliven his faith, and so he did. He went to Rome, passing by Loretto and Asizium. Confiding in Divine Providence, without any care or provision for the morrow, he spent entire days in prayer in the churches he met. Content with his poverty, he never would receive alms from needy persons, and also refused large sums sometimes offered him by people of means. He never kept anything for the following day, but gave all to the other poor. He spent nine months in the capital of the Christian world, devoutly visiting the shrines of the martyrs and the principal churches, in which he spent entire days and nights in prayer. Then he went to Fabriano to honour the relics of St. Romualdus, the founder of the Camaldulenses. He went through the kingdom of Naples, stopping at Bari to venerate the sacred remains of St. Nicholas, and at the church of St. Michael in Mount Gargano, and other pious sanctuaries, edifying all by his humble and mortified appearance, his fervent piety, and his assiduity in prayer. Later on he went to Our Lady of Einsiedlen, in Switzerland, visited the principal churches of a great part of Germany, and had the intention of coming to the tomb of St. James. At last, docile to the voice of God, he fixed his residence in Rome, and never left it except once a year that he went to Loretto. In all these excursions he conducted himself like a true anchorite, even in the most crowded

streets, and dressed in the poorest possible way, with his beads about his neck, as the sign of his servitude to the Blessed Virgin. These long and almost continual pilgrimages, performed in the midst of privations of every class, suppose a strong will and solid virtue, sustained by an ardent love of Jesus and a tender devotion to Mary. He spent six years in these penances, with indescribable spiritual fruit. He was afflicted when he saw the Lord offended, or thought that any soul could be so blind as to renounce the faith, or reject the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The very name of heresy made him tremble ; and, in order not to have to pass through heretical districts in his journeys, he took long and painful roundabouts.

V.

When established in Rome, he spent the greater part of the day in the churches, remaining long hours on his knees, though he had sores on them. He recited the divine office with great attention, and gave some time to spiritual reading, enjoying particularly the works of Fray Louis de Granada and the "Imitation of Christ." At nightfall, after hearing the instruction given to the poor in the Evangelical Hospice, he retired to his lodging. In the ruined walls of the Colosseum, Flavian's Amphitheatre, there was a hole large enough to contain a man and protect him from the rain. This was our beggar's lodging for many years. But his health, never very good, was soon completely broken. He took a swelling, which would have soon brought him to the grave, if another poor man, named Theodosius, had not secured for him a better shelter in the Evangelical Hospice. Here he rested at night the remainder of his penitential life, serving as an example of mortification, piety, and patience to the other poor inmates. He was never known to enjoy any of the pleasures of sense, not even that of hearing sacred music in any of the churches, and there never escaped from his lips a jocosé or idle word, much less a calumny or a complaint. In the midst of populous Rome,

in the centre of the Catholic world, he lived, completely forgetful of earth, emulating the solitude of the anchorites of Egypt. As far as food was concerned, his confessor had to oblige him to go once a-day to some convent for soup, except Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, when he allowed him to fast. On fast-days he only ate at nightfall a few crumbs of bread moistened in water. Wine he never tasted, except through obedience, at Christmas, the last years of his life. In his excursions to Loretto, after spending the day in the church, praying, kneeling, or standing, he was content with the offal of cabbage or lettuce which he gathered on the street. He did it all in a spirit of mortification and penance, and always refused any offers made him to alleviate the condition which he himself had chosen at the voice of God. To all offers he answered that he was a poor man and needed nothing. One day Mr. Valeri asked him:—"Why do you lead so miserable a life when you could meritoriously live in a way less incommodious and painful?" "God," answered Benedict, "wishes to lead me by this way." His ordinary answer to such questions was:—"God wills it." As regards piety, those poor had in our beggar a perfect model outside and inside the house.

When reciting the Rosary with them, which he did every night, he remained the whole time on his knees, motionless as a statue, and responding with the fervour of a seraph. Sometimes he would lose his senses and be carried away in ecstasy, to the great admiration of all. He gave great example to his companions of love and devotion to the Queen of Angels. He celebrated all her feasts with great fervour. Besides the Rosary and other devotions, he daily recited her Little Office, and visited with particular affection the churches or chapels dedicated in her honour. From his earliest years he had selected the Virgin as his mother, and loved her with filial affection. Nothing could be greater than this love, except the love he had for Jesus. These loves, or rather this love for Jesus and Mary, burned constantly in his

soul, and did not allow him to give his acquaintances other salutation than:—"Let us praise Jesus and Mary."

VI.

The love of Jesus crucified was the object of his most affectionate meditations. The more he considered the sufferings of Jesus, the more was he inflamed with the love of Jesus—a love which obliged him more than once to exclaim, contemplating Jesus carrying the cross:—"To me, Lord, to me that cross belongs: it is I who ought to bear it!" This love moved him to visit the churches in which any relic of the passion was venerated, and perform the *Via Crucis* on his knees. The devotion he had to this salutary exercise was edifying. Entertaining the most ardent charity for the blessed souls in purgatory, for whom he thought he never could do enough; burning with the desire of imitating Jesus Christ in His humiliation, pains, and sufferings; continually resolving to omit no means of repairing the injuries done the Saviour; asking at all hours for the grace to bewail and expiate the sins of his brethren. After the august sacrifice of the Mass, at which he attended with edifying recollection, he found nothing more efficacious than the devotion of the *Via Crucis*, enriched with so many graces by the Sovereign Pontiffs. The Colosseum, where, as we said, he used to live, was interiorly adorned with little chapels distributed in order, with paintings representing the different stages of Calvary. Benedict, availing himself of the occasion of gaining the innumerable indulgences of this devout exercise in favour of the blessed souls of purgatory, and the plenary indulgence granted by Benedict XIV. to those who did it in that place with a cross on their shoulders, employed the greater part of the day in this devotion, meditating fervently on the mysteries of the Passion. He also employed a great part of the night at it. Even when he removed his shelter thence, he did

not grow cold in this devotion, but rather appeared to derive more consolation from visiting that holy spot and repeating his pious practice. Hence the cardinals of the Congregation of Rites ordered him to be painted in the act of visiting these stations by night, so great was the love he bore Jesus; and this same love kept him whole days before Jesus in the Holy Sacrament. Daily he was to be found before Our Sovereign Lord manifested in the forty hours, and no distance or weather could prevent him from paying Jesus this tribute. There he was in the morning at Mass, there in the evening when the Blessed Sacrament was received; so that he came to be known as the "Poor Man of the Forty Hours." His love, however, seemed to reach the pinnacle of its perfection when he approached the sacred Table to receive Jesus within his heart. He prepared himself with great diligence for so great a favour, and when receiving could not contain his tears; and his face, pale as it was, became inflamed like a live coal. He spent the whole day giving thanks to God for this benefit, and, when he thought he was alone, would burst into ardent sighs to relieve his burning heart. It was here he learned that humility which made him shun every mark of respect as a great danger, and seek for humiliation and contempt, and that insatiable desire to suffer for the love of Jesus. I will mention some facts in proof of his humility and patience.

VII.

Passing one day through one of the squares of Rome, he saw some idle, shameless young men engaged in indecent games. The charitable servant of God approaches them, and says: "My children, is that the end for which God created you and preserves your lives?" Furious at these sweet words, they rise up against him, load him with injuries, and attack him with stones. A man took the beggar's part against the precocious young rascals; but the faithful imitator of Jesus

Christ would not allow him, saying: "Perhaps if you knew who I am, you would treat me worse than these."

Another time, when passing the square of Trajan's column, he was surrounded by a crowd of boys, who mocked and maltreated him with blows and insults, looking on him as a fool, but he bore all with the greatest patience and without a single complaint. His mortification and self-denial had no limits. Dead to the world and self, he breathed only Jesus crucified.

The nearer he approached his end the more fervent he grew, and though he endeavoured to conceal the extraordinary graces with which God favoured him, and prayed that they might not be made public, yet he could not prevent being sometimes elevated in the air, or surrounded by an aureola of light, by which the Almighty manifested the sanctity of his servant. His prayer was continual, solely interrupted by the performance of some work of mercy, if it could be said to be interrupted at all, for even when eating and sleeping he was praying. In the short time he reposed at night he would continually utter fervent aspirations, for his companions testified that they never awoke without hearing him mutter these or like ejaculations: "Jesus, mercy! Pardon, my God: inflame me in the fire of Thy love!" The Lord had given him the gift of prophecy, of which he sometimes availed himself for the good of souls.

He met, on a certain occasion, one of those young men, who, far from blushing at their disorders, made a boast of them. Benedict approached him, and said, with ineffable sweetness and charity: "My son, you are at enmity with God. Endeavour as soon as possible to make a good confession, for you are very near your death." The young man laughed at the beggar's simplicity, and mocked him as a fanatic; but, unhappily, the prediction was soon fulfilled, and the unhappy man died impenitent.

More fortunate was another person, who was grievously attacked by a temptation of the devil. "Brother," said the servant of God to him, "drive away those

thoughts, for they are a diabolical temptation." The man tempted was thinking of abandoning his wife, and with this advice from heaven he entered on the path of salvation. He foretold to his confessor, weeping, the honours which would be paid himself after his death, descending to minute particulars.

VIII.

On Spy-Wednesday, the 16th of April, 1783, after spending Lent in the exercise of rigorous penance, he fainted from weakness on the steps of the Church of Our Lady of the Mountains in Rome, and was carried to the house of his friend, Sr. Zacarelli, and while they were reciting the Litany of the Blessed Virgin for him, he rested in the peace of the Lord. "The saint is dead," cried all, "the poor saint is dead." An immense concourse hastened to venerate the martyr of penance. His body, exposed for five days to public veneration, preserved its freshness and flexibility without the slightest indication of putrefaction. Everything occurred as he had foretold, notwithstanding the precautions to the contrary. The Lord glorified his memory by working miracles at his intercession, and soon his grave became the object of universal veneration.

Some incredulists, however, mocked at the servant of God as a lazy, idle person; as if to live constantly in prayer to intercept the bolts of divine vengeance ready to be discharged on a corrupt world were a thing of little importance, and should be regarded as an idle exercise; as if to follow the will of God, clearly made known, giving heroic examples of humility, meekness, and all other virtues, were a life reprehensible and sterile to the world! This is the belief of men truly indolent and without the fear of God. This was the belief of Mr. Thayer, an Anglican minister, who was in Rome in 1783, when the Sacred Congregation of Rites gave the beggar the title of venerable. But the number of miracles reported of the servant of God, and daily on the increase, excited the minister's curiosity and induced

him to examine them himself with scrupulous care. For this purpose he interrogated the persons on whom they were wrought, he inquired into all the circumstances, he consulted the doctors who had attended them, and he could do no less than confess that there was something supernatural in those cures. Surprised and strangely agitated was the minister on discovering the truth of the Catholic religion in the life and miracles of a poor beggar. At last, conquering himself and his prejudices, he abjured his errors and embraced Catholicity, as the only anchor of salvation. His conversion worked radical changes in his soul. "The truths," he said, "which formerly I had the greatest difficulty in believing, are those that now afford me the greatest consolation. The mystery of the Eucharist, which appeared to me absurd, has been converted into an inexhaustible mine of spiritual delights. Confession, which formerly I looked on as an intolerable yoke, appears to me infinitely sweet on account of the peace it communicates to my soul. Ah!" he exclaimed, "if heretics and infidels could only feel the sweetness experienced at foot of the altar, soon would they cease to be so." Before he returned to America, his native country, ordained priest in 1787, he was a year in London, in the district where the poor and the beggars congregate. He lived poor like them, he built them two schools, he preached to them in a ruined factory which served him as a church, and converted a great number from sin to grace and from Protestantism to the true Faith. They loved him as a father, and joyfully brought him stray sheep day by day. Then he went to Boston, and was a true apostle of the Catholic religion. Such was the recompense with which our beggar repaid from heaven the mockery with which he had insulted him, and which later on was washed out in tears of true repentance. Pius IX., in view of his heroic virtues and numerous miracles, beatified poor Labre on the 20th May, 1860, and on the 10th of February, 1873, enrolled him in the catalogue of saints.

ST. LIDUVINA, NIGHT-WATCHMAN'S
DAUGHTER.

I.

IN this glorious virgin was seen how much a mortal creature, aided by divine grace, could do; for, considering the weakness of human nature, it appears totally impossible that a frail woman could have suffered the tortures and pains that afflicted our saint. Clothed with supernatural virtue, Liduvina showed us the path we should pursue, if we wish to enjoy any consolation in this rough exile when broken down by loss of health and other infirmities. She was born in Eschieda, a county of Holland, of poor but honest and pious parents. Her father, named Peter, was a night-watchman of the town; her mother, Petronila, a native of Ketet, was a prudent and industrious woman. They had eight sons besides Liduvina, who was the fifth fruit of their union. It may be said that she began to suffer from her very cradle the painful infirmities which were to be the patrimony of her whole life. Her virtuous mother, ever solicitous for the consolation of her daughter, tried every remedy, and above all, endeavoured to plant in the child's heart the seed of heroic virtues.

With her mother's milk she drank in a tender devotion to the Queen of Angels, so that the first words she lisped were the sweet names of Jesus and Mary. When her parents went to visit an image of the Blessed Virgin, held in great devotion by the people of Eschieda, she always wished to follow them, though scarcely able to walk, from her tender years. All the good examples she saw in the family were indelibly engraved on her little heart. When she was a little bigger, and was sent by her mother with her brother's dinner, she often went into the church, going or coming, to pay her respects to the Sovereign Queen. Her mother sometimes scolded her, and called her a lazy girl for the delay, but she would disarm her thus: "Don't be angry

mother, for I only paid a visit to the Blessed Virgin, and she was very kind to me." With such answers the mother was appeased, and endeavoured to increase the pious sentiments of her daughter.

When over twelve years of age, as she was a girl of extreme beauty and expert in domestic affairs, she was looked after by several rich youths, who asked her for wife of her father. He at last, influenced by the continual entreaties of one of them, who could give her a good position, which would free her from the dangers of the world, earnestly proposed the matter to Liduvina. But she answered with modesty and submission: "Father, if you love me, I beseech you to allow me to keep for God the treasure of my virginity." Her father did not wish to annoy her further, though now and again he repeated the matter, to see if she remained firm in her resolution; but the holy virgin always persisted in her answer, frequently praying God to remove such thoughts from her father's mind. When Petronila heard what was going on, she solemnly disapproved of it, as well on account of her daughter's youth as for the pleasure it gave her to think she should consecrate herself to God. And so resolved was Liduvina in her noble intention, that, weeping, she told her mother, in case her father should insist on her marrying, she would pray to God to make her so ugly that no young man would look after her. The holy virgin was redoubling her prayers, she was becoming more attached to retirement, she was daily conceiving a deeper contempt for the vanities of the world, when the Lord visited her with an accident, which became the source of pains and sufferings during her mortal career.

II.

On the western side of Eschieda runs the River Mosa, which empties itself into the sea not far from the town. To this river, frozen the greater part of winter, the youth of the town used to come to skate. On the

glassy surface of the ice various groups were making rapid and difficult evolutions. Some female friends of Liduvina, then fifteen years of age, invited her to go to skate. She refused, notwithstanding that they reminded her of the lovely evening the Lord had sent them ; but in the end, when asked to go at least to look on, she yielded and accompanied them to the river. Now her companions were flying like arrows over the ice, and Liduvina, to warm herself, was putting on her skates, when one of her companions, in her rapid flight, collided with the saint, and, throwing her down, broke one of her ribs. Now began the weeping and lamentation. They carried her home, and the doctors consulted for the relief of the poor thing, but all in vain. God wished to try in the crucible of tribulation His servant and her Christian family. After spending on medicine and surgeons all they had, they daily found her getting worse. Her pains grew more intense, and in the end a large abscess grew in the place of the wound.

A famous doctor, a great lover of the poor, assured the afflicted parents that all they might spend would be useless, for he saw something supernatural in their daughter's illness which all the medical men in the world could not cure, for they are useless in opposition to the divine will. Destitute now of human hope, they had no remedy but to turn their eyes to the Father of mercies in search of consolation. Great as her resignation was, the poor sick girl, from the intensity of the pains, could not do less than relieve herself in groans, lamentations, and contortions, which moved all who saw her to pity. One day her pious and patient father was sitting at her bed-head consoling and animating her to suffer with resignation to the divine will ; but the stings of the abscess increasing, the patient uttered groans and sighs ; and, beside herself from intense pain, she threw herself out of the bed into her father's arms. The fall broke the tumour, but interiorly ; and then immediately followed terrible vomitings and retch-

ings, which brought tears to the eyes of the bystanders. All her members soon swelled: she could scarcely move except on hands and feet, and even this with acute pain. All food caused her disgust and nausea, and if she tasted anything she immediately threw it off with great torment. She only felt a keen longing to drink dirty water, to eat earth, and such like things. Liduvina had become another Job, despised of men but dear to God.

One day two bullies were fighting in front of the sick girl's house, and one of them, escaping from the other's sword, took refuge in it. Thither, also, ran the aggressor, thirsting for blood. "Where is he?" he asked Petronila, "where is this son of death?" Petronila, seeing him pale and drunk with vengeance, tremulously denied that he entered the house. The assassin, however, went into the sick girl's room, and inquired for his enemy. "He is here," answered the saint. At these words the other was appeased, and left without doing or trying to do any damage. Notwithstanding the unexpected effect, Petronila was enraged, and harshly struck her daughter, saying: "How dare you discover on the poor fellow who was flying from death?" The humble daughter, receiving the chastisement with resignation, reverently answered: "I beg your pardon, mother, but I believed that God would sooner free him if I told the truth than if I uttered a lie." The mother was calmed by this mild answer, and was, at the same time, taught how pleasing sincerity is to God.

III.

In the meantime the patient grew worse. She had a complication of diseases—lungs, liver, kidneys, head and throat were grievously afflicted, and even maggots grew in incredible numbers in several parts of her body: she became so ill that she was unable to receive the Holy Eucharist, and she was covered with sores from head to foot, so that she could get no rest by night or day, and she lasted in this state for thirty-eight years. Her

family's resources were now exhausted, and they had to beg alms at their neighbours' doors, and not always did they meet with charitable souls. They sent one time to a rich man, named P. Andrews, for the fat of a chicken, and though he had several prepared for a splendid banquet he was giving, more anxious about his guests than the poor of Jesus Christ, he refused, with insult. The hand is not closed on the poor with impunity. In just chastisement of his avarice and want of pity for the afflicted, when the birds prepared for the grand dinner came to table they were found to be covered with maggots.

With this accumulation of ills, what wonder that the suffering virgin, when she heard her companions laughing and diverting themselves on the street, should burst into tears, and even sometimes make her poor dwelling resound with her groans and lamentations? The saints are not made of iron: they are men like ourselves, mortal, passible, and subject to the miseries of life. But the Lord, who never afflicts us without the corresponding aid, sent to His devout servant a holy man named John Pot, to open to her the source of true consolation to be found in the passion of Jesus Christ. He visited her one day, and on witnessing her indescribable torments, "Daughter," he said to her, "have confidence in God, who alone can console you. Frequently consider the interior and exterior sufferings of our Redeemer, His poverty, His humility, His persecutions, His agony, His desolation, and you shall see how little is all we can suffer, great as our pains may be. God sends great crosses to whomsoever He loves, for in the cross is our treasure. Let us, then, follow in the footsteps of Christ, laden with our cross, and we shall feel true consolation." The afflicted patient promised to follow his good counsel; but, despite her good intention, when she felt attacked by the intense pains of her many and complicated diseases, she could only think of her lamentations and groans. "How, father," she said to her director, "can I think of those good things when the agony of death is on me, and I

neither see nor feel anything but my pains, which blot from my memory your salutary and consoling advice?" "Courage, my daughter," answered the zealous priest; "everything is not done in a day: the crown is only promised to the persevering; if you try, according to your strength, to suffer like a good Christian, your eternal reward shall not be small." The poor sick girl was animated by the exhortations of the good minister of Jesus, and in the practice of his counsel she began to taste the sweetness of the cross and feel a dislike for human consolations, and avoid vain and idle conversations, from which she formerly derived some comfort.

IV.

One day the fervent priest brought her Communion, and, taking the Sacred Host in his hand, he addressed to her, with great unction, these few words: "On other occasions, my daughter, I exhorted you to keep before you the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ; and now this same Lord, who suffered and died for us, comes in person to speak to you as to His beloved daughter. If you act as such, your reward will be ineffable." At these words the virgin burst into loud sobs, not now from the pain of her sufferings, but from consolation and a sweetness she had not experienced till then. After this grace her heart was so consoled, that for fifteen days she could not repress her tears when she recollected it; and, full of a martyr's energy, she asked no longer that her sufferings might be mitigated but increased, that she might give greater proofs of love for Jesus Christ. Her distaste for corporal food continued, but she experienced an extraordinary hunger for the Sacred Eucharist, and desired to receive it as often as possible. As Liduvina, from midway in her sickness did not taste human food, it is believed she was miraculously sustained by the bread of angels, who often came down from heaven to administer it and console her.

Her good director's counsels now began to produce fruit. She felt great alleviation and consolation in

thinking of the passion of Jesus Christ, which she had distributed over the different hours of the day, with the object of reflecting on them with more facility and advantage. With this celestial comfort, though her pains sometimes made her grind her teeth, she no longer uttered cries and laments, as they only served to her as monitors to raise her heart to Jesus crucified. It must have cost her a great effort to refrain from even a sigh or a groan, but with God's help she triumphed and gave Him thanks for judging her worthy to suffer something for His love. When asked once "What would she do to be free from so terrible a martyrdom?" she answered, that, "Though she could be cured by saying one Hail Mary, she would not do so, that she might, in her sufferings, have an opportunity of better imitating our Divine Saviour." Considering, during a carnival, the unspeakable torments our Redeemer suffered for us, and the ingratitude of men who, during these days, commit such excesses against Him, she generously offered herself to the Lord to make atonement for them. Jesus accepted her offer, and sent her so atrocious a pain in the leg, that from Quinquagesima Sunday to Easter she did not venture to ask for more. On another occasion, when the Lord was scourging the people with a plague, she asked Him to lift His angry hand off the country and discharge its vengeance on her, by sending her new sufferings. The Lord heard her prayer, and inflicted two new sores on her, one under the heart and the other in the throat; and the saint, desiring a third wound in honour of the Holy Trinity, she received it in the cheek, which remained during life, even when the others had healed.

Her life was a continual miracle. Despite the corrupt matter which flowed from her many sores, there was no foul smell: on the contrary, a soft fragrance was felt in the room, for which no one could assign a natural cause. And how, without a continual miracle, could Liduvina live without food or sleep? On the report of such wonders many persons came to visit her in her humble

dwelling, and see the living martyr, prostrated like another Job, rather on the dunghill than in bed. They did not all come with the same intention. Some went from mere curiosity to see the living image of death, others to seek proofs in support of their calumnies and show her up as an impostor and hypocrite, and very few with the object of improving themselves by her example and saintly conversation. She gave audience to those who sought it, during the short respites allowed her by her fever fits. From her lowly bed she exercised the zeal of an apostle, endeavouring to draw her visitors to God by her exhortations. As she had received from God the grace of penetrating spirits, she manifested to those in mortal sin the wounds of their souls, and warned them of the sufferings of hell. The good she animated to continue in the path of virtue, trampling on human respect, and keeping their passions down. To all she gave laudable advice suited to the state and condition of each. She consoled the afflicted by encouraging them to suffer for Jesus Christ with the hope of eternal enjoyment. She exhorted girls to fly idleness and vain amusements as the incentives of incontinence. She recommended to widows retirement and industry, and piety towards God and the poor. She advised the married to live in peace and mutual love, and to avoid stories and slanders, the poison of Christian concord. And to all she dwelt on the importance of fulfilling the divine precepts and frequenting the holy sacraments, as the inexhaustible source of consolation and strength.

V.

The Lord now visited our saint with another cross. Eight years was she lying in bed, attended by her Christian parents, who had sacrificed their all for their beloved daughter; but it pleased God to deprive her of this human consolation by taking her mother from her. The poor woman, though she had always been a good Christian and feared God, yet, when she found herself

sick and remembered the vanities of youth, and considered that the hour was approaching when she should stand before the tribunal of divine justice, was alarmed at the rigorous account she should have to render, and asked her daughter to recommend her earnestly to God, that she might die happy. Liduvina, who loved her with tenderest affection, consoled her like a good daughter, and told her she would not only pray to God for her, but from that moment made her a present of all her pains, sores, sufferings, prayers, and everything that in her life might be pleasing to God. Comforted by this offering, and full of confidence in the divine mercy, the poor woman slept the sleep of the just.

Nevertheless, the family felt desolation at the loss of such a treasure. Poor old Peter, who was now unable to act as watchman, and was unwilling to avail himself of the alms offered to the sick girl, was steeped in poverty and extreme misery. But the Lord, who never abandons the humble, amply provided for the venerable old man. William, the pious Count of Holland, went to visit Liduvina, and calling her father apart, said to him: "Through reverence for your daughter, ask of me whatever you require for the support of your old age, and your desires will be satisfied." "Illustrious prince," he answered, "I have never had riches, nor do I desire them, for I see that death deprives of all: twelve dollars a year will be enough for me to live on." The count ordered his treasurer to give him what he required, and told the old man to apply to him in all his wants. The devout old man, seeing in this the singular providence of the Lord, gave thanks to God, dedicated himself with more fervour to the divine service, and distributed among the poor any surplus he had. Though he frequently had Mass in the house, and was very decrepid and half blind, he yet went with tottering step and groping his way to the church to hear more Masses and pray for his benefactor. Liduvina, fearing some accident might happen, besought him not to leave the house,

where he could, with safety and ease, recommend himself to God; but the pious man wished to offer to the Lord that little sacrifice, and continued his religious practice.

One evening, when the good watchman was going to vespers, he met one whom he took to be an intimate and old friend. "And where are you going, Peter?" said the latter. "Come and take the fresh air, and then we shall both go to the church together." The innocent old man fell into the devil's trap, who had taken the form of his friend, and they went out together. The devil wished to try the virtue of Liduvina, as he did formerly that of Job, by destroying his family. When outside the town they reached a pit full of water, and the enemy gave him a push into it and disappeared. The poor old man tried to escape from the imminent danger of drowning, but if a carman had not passed by and rescued him half dead, he would undoubtedly have perished. The news of the misfortune was carried to the sick girl, but almost immediately her father arrived, and her grief was turned into joy when she saw him safe. Her love for him was very great, and she tried by every means in her power to make his earthly trials as light as possible.

No wonder she should be solicitous about her own, she who was so liberal and generous to strangers. Her mother had left her some trinkets and valuables, and she sold them and gave their price to the poor. Despite her poverty, and it was a pity to see her lying in bed with scarcely sufficient clothes for decency, much less to protect her from the cold, which in winter often made her shiver, it may yet be said she was the alleviation of the needy, the mother of the orphan, and the right arm of the neglected. When devout people, in compassion for her sufferings, sent her alms, she looked on herself as only the agent in the case, and gave the surplus, which was nearly all she got, in charity to the poor, particularly to those who were ashamed to beg, and to poor women in labour. The Lord failed not to manifest, even miraculously, how pleasing to Him were the self-

denial and the generosity of the holy virgin. Among many occasions on which He multiplied the treasure of the poor, one was on the death of her brother William, whom she dearly loved. He had left several children, oppressed with debt. Their loving aunt sold some valuables that still remained to her, put the money in a purse, and gave it to her nephew Nicholas to take from it what would pay the creditors. The young man took it, satisfied all demands, and in the end found in the purse the same sum that had been put in it. As this miraculous phenomenon was repeated several times, the charitable patient called it "the purse of Jesus," for no matter how much she took from it for the support of the needy it was never empty.

VI.

Jesus also, in a pleasant vision, showed her how agreeable to Him alms-giving was. She was carried one day in spirit to heaven, where, besides the army of the blessed, emitting torrents of light, and presided over by the Saviour and His Blessed Mother, she also saw rich tables covered with cloths of silk and gold, and sparkling with celestial adornments, on which the angels were depositing the alms given to the poor. There she saw the water given to the thirsty placed in golden cups, the clothes sent to the naked preserved in beautiful baskets of filigree, the money distributed to the needy enclosed in boxes made of rubies and diamonds, the tears she had dried converted into pearls of ineffable beauty, and in the same way all the other works of Christian charity represented by some unexpected symbol. Filled with enthusiasm at this, and enamoured of the inexplicable reward which the Lord has prepared for the almsgiver who dies in His divine grace, she never ceased to recommend generosity and liberality to a poor neighbour. As Tobias did to his son, so this charitable virgin exhorted all to give much to the poor if they had much; and if little, even of that little to distribute something to the indigent. But she was not cou-

tent with the corporal alms alone, but always accompanied it with some good advice intended to improve their morals.

We have already seen the interest she took in the spiritual welfare of those who visited her. Among those who now and again frequented her house was a woman of bad life, who was a stumbling-block to several. It is wonderful how she laboured to bring her to the right path, often revealing to her her most secret thoughts and designs; but all was useless, for, blinded by her disorders, she could not be brought to see the eternal torments, which her momentary and base pleasures would cost her. The zealous patient also warned a young man involved in the nets of that evil woman, but her charitable efforts were all lost on him. At last the unfortunate daughter of Babylon died, and the young man went to the saint and asked her if she knew the fate of the deceased. The chaste virgin answered: "Do you wish to see her with your own eyes?" He answered, "Yes;" and Liduvina, commencing to pray fervently, they were both rapt in spirit, and immediately saw in the distance a troop of infernal spirits coming and dragging along the unfortunate woman. Loaded with irons, emitting fire from eyes and mouth, converted into a burning torch, she was uttering fearful screams and lamentations. . . . The young man afterwards told his friends that, without the special aid of God, he should have died of terror and dread at seeing his mistress converted into a horrid devil. But, in spite of all, in spite of so terrible a warning, in spite of the entreaties and charitable advice of the patient, regarding the vision as a witchery of the saint only to be laughed at, he remained hardened in his vices, and died as he had lived, a slave of Satan. Oh! how true is that saying of our Saviour, mentioned in the history of Lazarus, to the effect that if they will not hear the voice of the Church, neither would they believe the very damned if they returned to advise them.

The loss of these unhappy wretches deeply afflicted the saint's heart, ready, as she herself assured her sweet

Jesus, ready to endure the martyrdom of her sufferings to the Day of Judgment for the conversion of one sinner. This she longed for, this she constantly prayed for; and that her prayers might be the more acceptable to the Lord, she avoided the slightest fault, and the moment she felt she had made the smallest slip, whether in an idle word or a foolish complaint, or anything else, she immediately confessed it with bitter tears of repentance. Nor did she take less care of the other virtues, particularly of the foundation of all, humility. She obeyed all, she wished to be despised by all, from all she received with equal sweetness advice and warning. With a sovereign condescension, the Lord impressed the sacred stigmata on her hands, feet, and side; but Liduvina, to avoid vain-glory, asked Him to let her feel the sufferings without the exterior wounds. But the person she practised humility with most was a sister-in-law of hers. She was a noisy, harsh, ill-tempered woman, and so wicked that she heaped insults on the poor sick creature, and sometimes spat in her face without remorse. The patient virgin suffered it all in silence, and when once asked why she put up with such treatment she answered: "We should bear it with patience, that our example may make the poor people enter into themselves and acknowledge their fault, that we who need it may copy their virtue. Besides, by suffering, we do not give them occasion to become more angry and offend God more grievously." This she learned from her continual meditation on the sufferings of Jesus Christ, which caused her to rejoice so much in her pains, humiliations, and want of all things, that her poor hut appeared to her a palace: the sack-cloth with which she mortified her afflicted body a rich garment, her sores precious pearls, and all her other torments pleasures of heaven. She was asked once if she had sufficient for her wants, and she said she had more than enough. When those present who knew her poverty replied that what she said could not be true,

she answered: "He has plenty to spare who is content with what he has and desires to divide with the poor."

Some persons were once in pious conversation with the sick girl, and said to her that the Lord should comfort her much, for otherwise she could not have borne so much suffering. "It is true, my friends," she answered, "that Liduvina, the little wretch, could not last so long if the Lord did not comfort her with the crumbs that fall from His table." But it was not with crumbs but with splendid banquets that the Lord supported His fervent servant. She had sweet and familiar intercourse with the angels guardian, who brought her tidings of her beloved Jesus and of the Virgin Mary. Her own angel, to make her meditation on the sufferings of our Saviour more easy, often carried her in spirit to Jerusalem, and showed her, one by one, the places where Jesus suffered, so that she could in spirit kiss the spots sanctified by the footsteps of the Redeemer, and, like Magdalen, water them with tears of love and penance. A God-fearing widow, named Catherine, to whom, as an intimate friend, the saint sometimes recounted the favours God did her, earnestly entreated her to use her influence with God to let her see, if it were only once, the angel that visited her. Liduvina consented; and hearing from the angel himself that the Lord would grant the favour, she notified her friend to prepare for it. The two were together in the room, when the angel appeared in the form of a beautiful young man, his face radiant as the sun, his garments white as snow, and covered with gold, emeralds, pearls, and other precious stones of immense value. The widow was enchanted at sight of the heavenly messenger, when, at the request of the sick girl, the angel turned to her, and with that sole look she was filled with ineffable sweetness. The poor woman cried with delight, and to enjoy but a few instants more that entrancing pleasure, she would willingly have given all the pleasures and delights of the world if she had them

in her power. The recollection of this helped to encourage Catherine to serve the good Jesus with all her strength, "for if all the goods of earth," she said, "are despicable in comparison with the smallest of glory, what will it be to enjoy for eternities without end the Source of all goodness, of all beauty, the centre of all felicity—our Lord God?"

She also was sometimes visited by our Saviour and His Blessed Mother, who would animate her to suffer her pains and infirmities in imitation of them. In glory the slightest act of resignation and conformity to the divine will would yet be of more value than all the visits and extraordinary favours with which the Lord sweetened her sufferings. In one of the apparitions Jesus presented Himself with a wreath of flowers in His hand, as a symbol of the reward with which He would crown her patience. He gave her, however, to understand that it was necessary to perfect it yet with new pearls and other adornments. This stimulated the poor girl to live with more recollection, and to suffer her trials with greater patience. One of its most precious jewels was to come through another channel. Some of the domestics of Philip, Count of Burgundy, came, and, under pretence of examining the reality of the reports about the saint, not only indecently looked at her body covered with sores, but inflicted a wound on her to satisfy themselves of the truth of her dropsy. They maltreated a niece of the saint, who tried to defend her aunt, throwing her on the ground and injuring her very much. The patient Liduvina calmly received this as she did all her injuries, and would not allow anyone to bring an accusation against the delinquents. But the Almighty took the chastisement into His own hands, and punished them in this and the next world for it. In reward of this heroic act of patience and fortitude, Jesus appeared to her with the wreath perfectly finished, as if to indicate how pleased He was with her meekness, and that the day of her departure was approaching.

VII.

The Lord deprived her of these visits whenever she incurred any, even the slightest, imperfection. This happened, for instance, in the extreme grief she felt for the death of a brother of hers, and later on for that of her favourite niece, Petronila. She prepared herself, therefore, to bear with more perfect moderation the death of her dearly-beloved father. The poor thing was almost dreading the approach of the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary; for the good watch-man had told her that the Blessed Virgin had promised to take him on that day. And so it happened, after a life full of merit acquired by labour and the practices of piety. This time the saint bore her loss with great resignation, as she had a moral certainty that the pious old man had ended his days clothed in divine grace. But she did not neglect to pray for his eternal repose, as she always did for the blessed souls of purgatory. For them she offered her pains, and that God might liberate them from their terrible prison, she sometimes offered to suffer for them all the pains the Lord might be pleased to send her.

Her angel guardian occasionally accompanied her in a visit to these dreadful prisons destined to purify souls from all stain, and make them worthy to enter into the sanctuary of justice and sanctity, and there she saw them enduring all kinds of suffering. Now and again a kind of dew fell on them to soften their torments, and this was the prayers and good works of the just, which ascended in a cloud to the throne of the Most High. The Lord, who accepted the satisfactions which Liduvina offered for them on her bed of pain, sometimes manifested to her the joy and delight with which, when freed from those torments by the merits of pious souls, they flew to the bosom of God to be submerged in an ocean of felicity and happiness. The saint used to say that, on the greater festivals of the Church, when the faithful, after confession and Communion, are accus-

tomed to pray with more than usual fervour for the dead, was when the greater number went to sing the divine praises. Hence we should never allow a principal feast of Jesus or Mary to pass without receiving the Bread of Angels, after a good confession, with the object of gaining merits and indulgences for the rescue of our deceased brethren. When the malign spirits saw the fervour with which Liduvina prayed for her father's soul, they availed themselves of this solicitude to disturb her peace and tranquillity of mind. They appeared to her, screaming that they already had in their clutches the author of her days; but the servant of God, firmly convinced that her father was in heaven, both because he had died as a good Christian, and on account of the prayers offered in suffrage for his soul, despised these efforts of the father of lies, laughed at the noise and screams of his agents, and routed them from her presence.

VIII.

Liduvina sent forth new rays of light as she was approaching her end. In the last years of her life, as if what she suffered up to that were not enough, all her old ailments were renewed, and others added. But her trial was short; for, some time before she died, the Lord restored to her some members she had almost lost, and this made her prepare for her last hour, which Jesus had revealed to her. Near her end now, she gathered the family around her bed, and humbly asked pardon for any disedification or offence she might have given, and promised, if the Lord should take her to glory, to intercede for the eternal salvation of all. She had well-founded hopes that she should soon fly to the embrace of her beloved Jesus. He had appeared to her, attended by His Blessed Mother, the holy Apostles, her angel guardian, and other happy spirits, who had come to witness her Extreme Unction. Jesus stood at the sick girl's right, and Mary at her left, and the holy oils

being arranged on a rich table by the angels themselves, a cross appeared in the midst, shedding refulgent rays of mysterious light. Then Jesus, the Eternal Priest, advanced and anointed the saint Himself, giving her new strength for the last struggle against the powers of hell. When this august ceremony was concluded, in thanksgiving for so signal a favour, she besought our Saviour that, as He had during life made her a participator of His cross, so in death He would let her feel the pains of His agony, to crown all she had suffered; and the good Jesus consented.

On Easter Sunday night she asked the people of the house and her confessor to leave her alone to treat of her affairs with God, or at least, accompanied by a little nephew, named Baldwin. To this they consented, after being earnestly pressed by her. After a little the saint entered on her agony, and began to feel the sharpest pains, spasms, and inexplicable sufferings. One would think that all kinds of afflictions were accumulated on her at once. Seeking some consolation in Baldwin, as Jesus had in His Apostles, she said to him: "Ah, my child! these sufferings are worse than death itself! The will of God be done!" The child, weeping, asked her if he should call her confessor or some of the family, and finding she did not answer, he ran out to tell them. They came in and found her dead, her hands joined in the attitude of prayer, and on one side the sackcloth she had used to punish the members which were lately freed from pain. Liduvina had gone to accompany the King of Glory in His triumph, as she had followed Him in His dolorous Passion. She died on Easter Sunday, the 14th of April, 1433, at fifty-three years of age. Some pious souls saw her enter heaven in great pomp, to receive the reward of the pains and sufferings she had borne with Christian resignation. The Lord glorified her relics with many miracles.

VEN. GERONIMA DOLZ, SERVANT, DRESS-
MAKER, AND SCHOOLMISTRESS.

I.

FOUR leagues from Valencia, in a village called Olocan, our virgin was born, and was baptised on the 14th of May, 1677. Soon she entered on the way of the cross. Having lost her father and mother in the first months of her infancy, a poor farmer and his wife undertook to rear her, and Divine Providence took her under His protection. When yet a child she incautiously approached a mill-dam, and stumbling fell into the water. A man at a distance saw her, and ran to her aid, but could not have saved her only God supported her till he caught her by the hair, and drew her out safe and sound. At about four years of age she fell dangerously ill, and having died to all appearance, she was prepared for the grave. With this, a religious Franciscan lay-brother arrived, and turning to the bystanders said to them:—“Why did you put the shroud on her and she alive?” “Why,” said they, “do you not see in her all the signs of death?” “I see signs of life,” he answered:” and taking her by the hand, he said to her: “Get up, for God marks you out for greater works of his grace.” Geronima arose, and now required no doctors to aid the powerful one she had in heaven.

As soon as she could do it, they employed her in herding cattle, and thus she became inured from her youth to heat and cold and all sorts of toil. During this time two things deserving particular attention occurred to her. The first was this: In the hot days of July, a religious of the Order of Merced, when going somewhere to preach, sat down in the shade to rest from the fatigue of the journey. Whilst taking some refreshment, he began to rehearse the sermon on Mary Magdalen, which he was about to preach. The Lord brought our little girl near, and she heard him dwell on the fasts and penance which the follower of Jesus performed in a cave near Marseilles.

Geronima was then about six years of age, and resolving to imitate Magdalen, she sought out a grotto, and for three days fasted on wild dates and herbs, and actually punished her innocent flesh with a discipline she made of Esparto grass; but at the end of that time her friends found her, and compelled her to go home.

The other was her correction of the farmer who was rearing her for a perverse habit he had. The poor man used to get angry with the bullocks he ploughed with, and sometimes cursed and swore at them, as ill-trained people are accustomed to do. Geronima heard these expressions, and God allowing it to give us a warning of the evil influence of bad example, innocently repeated them when driving the cattle to pasture. Her master heard her, and though aware of the child's innocence, scolded her for it, and told her not to say such words, for it was a sin to do so. When Geronima heard him qualify as sins expressions she did not understand, she trembled with fear, and turning on her master, said to him: "I used them without knowing what I was saying; but how can you utter them so frequently when you know they offend God? You are guilty of that for which you reprove me. And if we should fly from those who give bad example, and you do not amend, I shall have to leave your house." The poor man, far from profiting by the lesson the Lord taught him by a child's mouth, got angry and told her to be off at once, that he did not like bold girls, to leave her clothes in the house and go and earn them. The poor orphan of seven years stripped herself, and sitting under a fig-tree, took some of the leaves and sewed them together to cover herself. When thus employed she was found by a pious woman, who tenderly soothed her weeping, put clothes on her, and took her home again. There she continued to serve God in the midst of toil and hardship till she was ten years of age, when the poverty of her guardians compelled them to take her to Valencia to look out for a decent house to put her to service in.

As they were on foot in the great heat of summer, they rested under the shade of a tree, when a monk, apparently a Carthusian, came up and said to them : "You are going to Valencia in search of a master for this tender child ?" And without waiting for an answer he put his hand on her head, and said : "May God make you a saint." That good religious appeared as an angel who came to foretell her future, and enliven Geronima's spirit.

II.

When they reached Valencia, they placed her at service in the house of a good citizen, where she was treated like a daughter, and she endeavoured to correspond to the love of her Christian employers. Virtue and the performance of her duty were the two, or rather the only care she had on earth ; and harmonising devotion with diligence she made gigantic strides on the path of perfection. She had scarcely reached thirteen years of age, when, stimulated by the examples of the saints, she resolved to offer perpetual chastity in holocaust to the Lord. For this she sought pen, ink, and paper, things she had never used in her life, for she did not know how to write, and prostrated before a devout image of the Conception, after tender colloquies with the Blessed Virgin, carried away by a divine impulse, she wrote with her own hand these words : "I, Geronima Dolz." Tenderness stopped her here, and raising her eyes to Mary, she said : "Lady, you know better than I what I wish to write on this paper ; supply my want, and accept the offering of your humble servant." Saying this she offered the paper to the Virgin, who took it in her celestial hand, in proof that she accepted the sacrifice. With this, Geronima was rapt in sweet ecstasies, and distinctly heard the Sovereign Queen encouraging her to the fulfilment of her promise ; and the Infant God presented Himself, smiling and radiant, and took her hand in proof that He accepted her as spouse, and was prepared to defend her virginal candour against the attacks of the

world. This singular grace made such an impression on her, that she never recollected it without shedding abundance of grateful tears. Thenceforth they appeared to vie with each other, she to please Jesus, by seeking His greater glory in all her works, and He to heap favours on his faithful and loving spouse. As a confirmation and complement of this was another favour He did her farther on. One night, after long hours of prayer as usual, she had retired to rest on her hard bed. Her eyes were scarcely closed when, without knowing whether she was asleep or awake, it appeared as if Jesus Christ, dissipating with His beams the darkness of night, accompanied by an army of brilliant angels, tenderly asked her hand. She gave it to Him with the love and reverence which virtue begets; and then the divine Spouse taking off a valuable ring, put it on her finger as a proof of his eternal love. The dream ended, but Geronima had that celestial adornment on her hand ever after: it would disappear, however, whenever she fell into any defect, or failed to give complete satisfaction to the Master of her soul.

The divine protection was indeed required to keep her free in the midst of the many dangers with which she was surrounded. Geronima was extremely handsome, of pleasing address, agreeable conversation, and innocently gay. These graces, which made her amiable and pleasing to all, inflamed a lascivious man with an infamous passion. Twice did he try to persuade her with presents and promises of happiness, as if felicity could exist in a corrupt heart. It was all in vain; for the scandalised virgin with superhuman efforts repelled his unworthy advances. She flew from the place, and would fly from herself, if possible, for in these combats courage and victory lie in flight. This was not the only triumph of her chastity. She got seriously ill in her master's house, and as there were no signs of improvement, he sent her back to the farmer's for change of air. She was scarcely well and had recovered her

natural beauty, when they wanted to marry her to a decent young man, counting on her obedience; and without consulting her they made the match. When she heard what was going on, she appeared as if wounded with a lance. She made various excuses to avoid it; but seeing they were of no avail, she told them with holy courage that she had consecrated her virginity to Jesus Christ, and that she would suffer a thousand deaths sooner than be unfaithful to Him, and give her hand to any man living. This resolution, capable of softening any Christian heart, only served to rouse the farmer's anger. He beat her severely and shut her up in a dark room, and threatened to let her die of hunger if she would not give in. Shut up in this prison she was three days without food, and going from one faint into another, she was momentarily expecting her last breath. This torment was enough to put an end to her, but another no less terrible was added. The place was infested with rats which, as she lay on the ground half dead, gnawed off her shoes and attacked her feet till the floor was covered with blood from her wounds. Geronima was content to die a martyr of chastity, and be able to offer these sufferings to her Divine Spouse. But Jesus was satisfied with the sacrifice of the will. On the third day a young child came to the door, and pitying the misfortune of the innocent maid, gave her a piece of bread through a hole. The poor girl for want of strength could not use it, but through the child she was able to inform the priest of what was occurring. The good pastor ran to liberate the dying lamb, who had to keep her bed for some time before she recovered her health.

III.

When her former strength was restored in the good ecclesiastic's house, he would not allow her to return to the farmer's, where she had run the risk of her life, but sent her to Valencia to the care of her master and mistress, who received her with marks of singular affec-

tion. There she returned to her usual labours and devotions. Always directed by some zealous Jesuit, she had engraved on her soul the maxim that all exercises of piety should yield to the calls of duty. She consequently so divided her time that she could have her housework done properly without interfering with certain devout practices compatible with her obligations. Her zeal and Christian training made her comply, without answer or complaint, with all the commands of her employers, and she could even anticipate their wishes so as to have things done before they ordered them. This was the reason why they appreciated her so much, and allowed her to do whatever her devotion suggested, for they knew her domestic duties would in no way suffer. Her first and principal devotion was constant intercourse with God. To God she offered her waking moments; to God, as soon as she got up, she consecrated all her works, and to God she tried to please in her lowliest occupations. Carried away by the sweet attraction of intercourse with God, of God she spoke in all her conversations, and the powers of her soul were so fixed on the things of heaven, that the slightest thing gave her wings to fly away there in thought. Though it might well be said she was constantly praying, for at her work she always kept herself in the presence of God, and enlivened the flame of divine love by fervent ejaculations, yet she had special times marked out for meditation each day. When her work was done she shut herself up in an attic, and there dedicated herself to prayer and the exercise of the *Via Crucis*, which she always ended with a discipline.

All this was necessary and suitable to conquer the enemy of her soul. There was in the house where Geronima was at service a man of no contemptible qualities, and much esteemed by the owners. He fell so madly in love with our chaste virgin, that day and night he persecuted her to show her his amorous anxiety. The girl avoided him as much as possible, and sternly rejected all his endearments. Having heard that it was

the beauty of her hair that principally excited the mad affection of the young man, she heroically resolved to cut it off, and deprive him of all incentive as far as she could. She consulted with her confessor, who praised her resolution, telling her at the same time to think well of it lest she might displease her employers. "I only require leave," said she, "for I shall manage the matter with God, so that no one will know the cause." Having obtained permission, she fervently asked this grace in prayer, and felt content that God would arrange it all. And so it was ; for, when returning from the church, she was attacked by fever, and erysipelas swelled her face and head like that of a monster. Her employers were alarmed at the attack, and immediately called in the doctor, who, finding that the swelling hourly increased, ordered her hair to be cut off to allow the remedies to be applied. But they were not required, for as soon as the hair was cut off the fever ceased, the swelling disappeared, and Geronima was whole and sound, and perfectly content with having been able to offer that sacrifice to her Divine Spouse. But the young man's impure love did not entirely cease, nor did he give up his attacks: however, he always found the chaste maid on her guard, and prepared to defend her chastity as the eagle does its young.

IV.

The devil, enraged at his defeats, took the matter into his own hands, and appearing to her under provocative forms, or suggesting foul thoughts, molested her without giving her a moment's peace. The chaste virgin had recourse to Jesus and Immaculate Mary as safe harbours of refuge ; but if she found the tempest increasing, as a quicker remedy in such straits she applied the discipline, and punished herself without mercy till the enemy retired, that he might not occasion merit where he expected to produce ruin. He appeared to her once as a beautiful young man, surrounded by splendours of glory, and spoke to her of spiritual things for the direction of her

soul ; but, soon changing his style of conduct, he tried to seduce her. Geronima, knowing it was the devil, seized her usual arms, the cross, and intrepidly attacked the enemy, who disappeared like a coward. She had a heart so enamoured of purity that she abhorred the very shadow of sin. Objectionable dress, indecent expressions, disedifying actions, filled her with bitterness if she happened to see or hear them. Even by their odour she knew persons infected by vice. "Put a peccats," she used to say in her provincialism—"he smells of sin," and would fly from those whom she found the prey of impurity. And what else are those unhappy wretches but stinking corpses? How many walk the streets and are nothing but whited sepulchres, beautiful in appearance, but in the soul more frightful and foul than death! On the other hand, God let her know chaste souls by visible signs. The appreciation with which in her eyes the Lord surrounded the beautiful virtue, made her live on perpetual guard, without permitting her senses or powers to dwell for a moment on dangerous things. She also avoided the more remote occasions, of which the world is full, and she would prefer to die of hunger sooner than engage on work that might serve as an incentive to vanity.

With such sentiments, sustained by frequenting the sacraments, Geronima spent some twenty years at service, till the disturbances of Valencia compelled her to leave and go to live in company with some devout women. Then she earned her bread by the labour of her hands and teaching some girls. Her whole life is a guarantee of the care she would have taken to imbue them with the holy fear of God. With tenderness and patience she attached them to solid virtue, and warned them to avoid bad company, and frequently purified their souls in the fountain of penance. Reverses in her undertaking did not dishearten her, such as if some of the girls did not avail themselves of her instructions as much as she could desire. On the contrary, with great kindness and patience she endeavoured to remedy the

defects she noticed, leaving the rest in the hands of Providence. It happened one day that a woman selling lace went into the school, and one of the children took a piece behind backs and kept it. The same girl, carried away by her perverse inclination, on a certain occasion committed a little theft. The child died penitent; and a few days after, when Geronima was sleeping one night, she heard a voice calling: "Mistress, Mistress!" She immediately awoke, and saw the child before her, with sad face and surrounded by flames, who besought her to ask the two women from whom she had pilfered the little things to pardon her faults, for, light as they were, she was suffering horribly for them in purgatory. Geronima promised to do what she asked, and moreover offered to apply some suffrages to hasten her eternal repose. In a short time she had notice that the prayers and suffrages had opened the gates of eternal glory to the child. The chaste virgin endeavoured to live in retirement; but in vain does the humble violet try to hide itself, for its grateful fragrance reveals the corner where it lies under cover. And so did it happen with our saintly mistress, the aroma of whose virtues attracted to her lonely dwelling persons of the highest distinction. This was to her a bitter torment, and to avoid such attention she often hid herself in the attic, when she heard a coach stop at the door, and paid no heed to their knocking. A certain lady one day complained that she did not find her at home. Geronima answered: "I was at home; but as I am not used to hear other wheels than those of the doctor stop at my door, when he visits me in my attacks, I could not convince myself that a coach would bring anyone to see me." With such answers she used to satisfy all complaints. On another occasion a noble family were anxious that Geronima should be god-mother to their first-born, and as she was likely to refuse, they sent a coach to bring her when everything was ready for the baptism. But she met their manœuvre with another, for as soon as she heard the coach stop at

the door, she threw herself into bed, dressed as she was ; and when the servant entered with the message, Geronima thus anticipated him : “ You see how I am : tell your employers I am in bed, for my attacks came on me without warning, leave, or licence.” For the purpose of avoiding the estimation of pious people, she took care to do nothing openly worthy of praise, and she asked the Lord, and He consented, not to do her extraordinary favours in public.

V.

In her last illness several persons visited her, and expressed their admiration for the heroic patience, edifying modesty, and eminent virtues of the fervent dressmaker, which was as a cruel martyrdom to her, and made her earnestly request that no one should be permitted to see her except the priests, who could aid her in her spiritual necessities. This was done, but they could not prevent a certain man from entering, who, among other things, said he would contribute to defray the expenses of her funeral honours. Geronima turned on the imprudent man, and said : “ Do not trouble yourself about the matter, for a preacher at my funeral will not be wanting : the devil has my sins plainly written down to publish them before the tribunal of God.” She felt so much the credit given her by those who went to seek her, that she confessed to those attending her that she was “ more affected by the praises she got than by all the pains she suffered.” From this profound humility arose not only a certain complacence whenever she was insulted and treated as the offscouring of the people, but also a holy hatred of herself which made her treat herself as guilty of the most enormous faults. The penitential rigours, which she commenced so early in her career, lasted her whole life. In her disciplines and other religious exercises her mistress used to keep her company, and they would go together to visit the sick in the hospital, attend to their wants, and give them

alms. Later on, her confessors, on account of her infirmities, prohibited the practice of many penances; but she never gave up the denial of her senses and powers. She never allowed her eyes to indulge in the slightest curiosity, and if she ever failed in this she was punished severely for it; for on two occasions she was struck blind when she yielded to a desire to witness public spectacles, but recovered her sight when a flood of tears atoned for her indiscretion.

She was yet more admirable in her victory over love of self. She was silent over injuries and insults, and such was the habit she acquired of tolerating outrages, that when her honour was wounded to the quick she did not complain or murmur, but only felt the offence her detractors offered to God: and this was the more wonderful as she was naturally of a hasty and ardent temperament. Among others, the Lord gave her a director who treated her with great harshness. The servant of God would go to him for consolation in her afflictions, but was repulsed with unsympathetic coldness. She would go to consult him in her doubts, and her only answer was a disdainful repulse. She got nothing from his intercourse but dryness and rigour, the Lord so permitting in order to make her the image of Jesus crucified. The poor thing was turned into a sea of bitterness, and almost became persuaded that her graces were illusions, and her good desires dreams or ravings. In this affliction, which was not the least of her spiritual ones, Geronima had recourse to her usual asylum of prayer, and prostrated before an image of the *Ecce Homo*, venerated in the professed house of the Society, fervently asked to be rescued from the dense darkness of doubts and perplexities, and if right that the Lord would inspire her in the choice of some more suitable director. A ray of light dissipated her clouds, when Jesus clearly answered: "Geronima, this is the one that suits you." On this her agitated heart was calmed, and she never changed him till her death, though she

had to endure his usually rough and severe treatment, not the most conformable to evangelical charity.

VI.

The Divine Hand alternated her voluntary mortifications and interior bitterness with sharp and severe attacks of illness, which she suffered with admirable patience and resignation. But when the doctors, wondering at the complication of diseases, and despairing of her recovery, ordered the last sacraments to be administered to her, she was cured in a miraculous manner. These, however, were not her most afflicting pains: she had a more terrible cup to drain in the cruel torments with which the devils afflicted her. With the divine permission, they tossed her in the air and beat her till almost dead, to make her give up her prayers or holy enterprises. In these contests the cross was her shield, and sometimes she called the saints to her assistance, particularly St. Ignatius and St. Francis, who came to comfort her. Our good dressmaker used to do some work with her needle to gain her livelihood, and she did it with singular care and cleanliness. The devils would sometimes soil and rip it and throw it out on the street to provoke her to impatience. But as she knew their wiles, she did not yield in the slightest degree, nor neglect her prayers, but continued them more fervently till she routed her enemies, and in the morning she would find her work as intact and clean as she had left it. What the common enemy of souls felt most was her frequenting of the sacraments; and as he could not prevent it with all his efforts, he struggled hard to deprive her of the merit of at least one communion. I will relate two things which happened in this connection.

She was going one day to the church to confession and to receive the Bread of Angels, when she met, as she thought, her director coming out of the college: "Geronima, you cannot go to confession or communion to-day, as I am very busy." Apparently her spiritual

father went on his way, and Geronima, reflecting that he did not prohibit her from hearing Mass, entered the church, where, to her great astonishment, she found her director in his confessional. Another day, the enemy, playing the same trick, met her in the figure of her confessor, and severely blamed her for going at that hour to confession, and told her she wanted to please her own will, but that he could not be ready at all times to hear her idle stories. The venerable woman was in great perplexity, but she obediently sacrificed her desires and returned home. She had scarcely reached it when she met a companion, who told her she was coming from Mass, and that her director was in the act of saying his. On this she knew the deceit the devil had practised, and returning to the church she found her confessor saying Mass. Such was the anxiety of Lucifer to keep her from the holy Table, for he knew it was the most powerful arms to resist him.

The infernal enemy also tried to upset the pious exercises of the servant of God. She annually performed the spiritual Retreat of St. Ignatius, from which she derived great advantage and new strength to bear the cross of tribulation, and the devil invented fresh plans to withdraw her from it. When meditating on the pains of hell, as the saint lays down in the first week, and considering those terrible flames, the devil carried her in spirit to that place of torment, and showed her what he said was her own soul enduring fearful tortures, as God had destined her, in His inscrutable designs, to burn eternally in that fire; and the Lord permitting, he made such an impression on her, that, believing herself the greatest of sinners and destined for damnation, she fell seriously ill, and had to receive the last sacraments. To avoid this danger, her director in future Retreats told her to omit the meditation on hell; and she did so till, four years before her death, he allowed her to renew it. She obeyed, but the devils attacked her and beat her till she was covered with wounds and bruises. All these

torments were not capable of subduing her will, and during the year she endeavoured to foster the fruit of the Retreat by constant meditation and recollection. The ordinary subject of her meditations was the passion of Jesus Christ, from whose stages, considered with holy leisure, she derived affections, now of compassion on contemplating Jesus so ill-treated; now of hatred of sin, which was the cause of His sufferings; now of insatiable zeal for the salvation of souls, which cost Jesus so much; now of ardent charity for her brethren.

VII.

In meditation and out of it the Lord supported His humble servant with extraordinary favours, from which she drew greater humility and contempt of self. I will mention a few of the more marked ones. When hearing Mass with accustomed fervour, she sometimes saw Jesus in the Sacred Host in the form of a beautiful infant, now as it were in agony, now supplicating her for some sacrifice. On returning one day from the church, she met a beautiful, well-dressed little boy, who was crying bitterly. Geronima, in pity, said to the child: "Where do you come from, child?" And he answered: "My brothers beat me, and drive me from home." Without understanding what this meant, Geronima took him by the hand and brought him home, with the intention of giving him something to dry his tears. But as soon as they entered the house, the child threw off his disguise and let her know that He was Jesus. He then told her that the cause of His weeping was the ingratitude of men, and disappeared, leaving the virgin shedding tears of sorrow. During the carnival, when so many excesses are committed, Jesus Christ used to appear to her in some of the tragic scenes of the Passion, whose torments are renewed by sinners. Geronima would pass those days of unbridled dissolution either in punishing her innocent body, or in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, to make reparation for so many offences. Oh! if souls

desirous of their spiritual good would run anxiously to Jesus in this loving prison, and do holy violence for the conversion of sinners, how soon would the present face of the world be changed !

The Blessed Virgin and her patron saints, particularly St. Ignatius and St. Philip Neri, equally favoured her. The Mother of God consoled her by visiting her in her troubles ; and her intercourse became so familiar that she would often awaken her to pray at the usual hour, saying : " Come, Geronima, bless the Lord, for it is now your hour." This also was sometimes done by the angels. One of the greatest afflictions the servant of God felt was her inability to approach the sacred table to receive the Bread of the strong during her severe attacks of sickness. But even this hunger was satisfied by the divine bounty, for in such cases He sometimes sent heavenly messengers to administer Holy Communion to her. Geronima corresponded to these favours by lively anxiety to suffer for Jesus, and an unlimited confidence in Divine Providence. A few months previous to her last illness, she suffered so intense pains that she prayed the Lord to give her some relief. The Divine Spouse hastened at her call, and with a benign countenance showed her a cross He had in His right hand and a wreath of beautiful flowers in His left, and said : " Choose, my daughter, whichever you wish : I am anxious to please you." Geronima regretted her prayer, and embracing the cross, said : " Why should I select the flowers, seeing that you are crowned with thorns ? Let suffering come, my God : listen not to the cries of my frailty. Let this dry trunk endure without alleviation, for it is only just the divine wrath should fall on it." These sentiments animated her during life, and made her love suffering as worldlings do ease and pleasure. A proof of her confidence in Providence is the contempt she had for the treasures of earth.

She was one day so short of necessaries that she had not only no money in the house, but not even a piece of

bread with which to appease her hunger, and only hoped to get something for a pair of stockings she was knitting. In the hurry of her work she remembered she could not finish them without losing Mass. Perplexed between her necessity and her devotion, she felt a strong interior impulse, and, without farther deliberation, she threw down the stocking and went to Mass. A few paces from the door she found a paper folded up, and inside it a threepenny piece, which was enough to satisfy her needs. But she was not content with satisfying her own wants: those of her neighbours touched her heart much more. It appears impossible that a woman so poor could succour the needy with her alms, and yet her ardent charity found plenty to give them. She divided with the poor everything she got from others and earned herself. She specially loved those who were ashamed to beg, particularly if their souls ran any risk. One Sunday, when making her thanksgiving after Communion, she heard an interior voice which told her to go home, where she would find an object of charity. She went at once, and finding no one, began to read the venerable Mother Mary de Agreda, when a handsome young girl arrived, and, full of virginal modesty, said to her: "I am come to ask you to help me in my great need." The charitable dressmaker did not deliberate long. She had only two shillings which she had got for some stockings, and she handed over to her the whole sum, saying: "Take this, Miss, as it comes from the hand of God, who succours us in necessity that we may be grateful to Him." The Lord also assisted His servant by extraordinary means.

VIII.

One day, after praying long before the Blessed Sacrament, she fainted, and was taken home by a companion. The poor woman was thinking on the way how she could comfort Geronima, for she knew there was nothing in the house, and it was not a time to go to look for it. To her great astonishment, when they got home

she found a saucepan boiling on the cold embers with a chicken in it, and everything necessary to strengthen a sick person. God is generous to the almsgiver, and Geronima was really one. And He made her His almoner; for often, when unable to work for the needy, she would find pieces of money under her pillow without knowing whence they came. The following act of charity was also wonderful: One day a poor man in rags, and half-naked, passed her door. She took pity on him and gave him a pair of shoes, the only thing she had to offer, and soon an unknown person came and gave her four shillings, as if in reward for her shoes.

But if her charity was great at sight of temporal necessities, greater still and more ingenious was it in the relief of spiritual ones. Her life was a tissue of brilliant examples of this. A woman of loose life came one day to order a pair of stockings, which should be made according to the latest fashion. The saint took advantage of the visit to speak kindly to her of her irregular way of living, and to remind her of the pains of hell, and the pleasure with which God received back erring souls. She made such an impression on her that the poor thing began to weep. Geronima led her before an image of the *Ecce Homo*, and then they both prayed in tears. The woman tore off her sinful adornments, and, making a bundle of them, threw them into the river. Then she went to confession, and afterwards getting ill, went to hospital, where Geronima attended her like a mother till God was pleased to call her to Himself.

IX.

As a greater stimulus to her zeal the Lord had endowed her with the gift of penetrating spirits. And it often happened that when people imbued in sin went to her for consolation and counsel, she opened their eyes to the foulness of their consciences, and reproved them with such charity that few there were who resisted her warnings and advice. Sometimes she touched the hearer's

heart with a joke only understood by himself. In this way she corrected and brought to compunction a priest who was not leading as holy a life as he should. And to obtain these good results she did not hesitate to expose herself to death. There was a woman lived near her who was leading a bad life, and the saint tried in vain to reform her. At last, finding all her efforts fruitless, she managed to have her removed from the district. The woman conceived such a hatred for her that she prevailed on her accomplice to take her life. He placed himself in a lonely spot by which Geronima should pass, and as she was going by raised his pistol to shoot her; but he could not only not fire, but was rooted to the spot like a statue. On the following day, when she was passing by the same place, he threw himself on his knees at her feet, and begged her pardon for his murderous attempt. Through the warning of the day before, and the saint's prayers, he not only repented of his crime, but resolved to leave this deceitful world and seek a safe retreat in some religious Order, and, guided by Geronima's prudent advice, he entered a very austere one, where he lived an exemplary and penitent life.

She never allowed an occasion to pass of promoting God's glory and preventing sin. One day she found a man and woman talking together in a solitary place, and knowing their evil designs, said to them: "Take a seat and rest, for you shall have time enough to suffer in hell, where a place is prepared for you." With this they turned their backs on each other, and went away. Though always animated by ardent zeal, she appeared to redouble it during the annual missions given by the Jesuits during the novena of St. Francis Xavier, and on the Sundays of Lent. Then she cried out to the Lord for the conversion of sinners, multiplied her penances, made new sacrifices, and ceased not till she obtained many conversions from the Lord, securing sometimes as many as five hundred.

The Almighty occasionally aided her apostolic charity

with evident prodigies. It often happened that, knowing from on high that some soul was beset by the enemies of our salvation, and in the risk of yielding, Geronima came to the aid of the afflicted one, penetrating its retirement, as Jesus did the supper-room, without opening the doors, and, with her fervent exhortations, dissipated the tempest. Blessed be the Omnipotent who inspires the little ones with great enterprises for His glory.

X.

Such a volcano of charity could not confine itself to the living. It extended also to the blessed souls of purgatory, who sometimes appeared to her to ask her prayers and suffrages. She was always trying, and engaging others to try, to get Masses said for their repose. It happened once that a priest whom she employed to say a certain number for a deceased person neglected one. The soul appeared to her and told her it was still suffering in the purifying flames from the want of that Mass. The charitable virgin went to the priest, and with her face covered, that he might not know her, accused him of neglecting the Mass. The minister of God was filled with alarm when he was reprehended for a mistake only known to himself, and, believing he was talking to the soul of the deceased, promised to say it immediately. He did so that very morning in Geronima's presence, who immediately left that she might not be discovered. The soul of her who had been to her in the place of a mother also appeared to her, at which the devout virgin wondered not a little, for, in her opinion, she had always led an edifying life. But the judgments of God are different from the judgments of men. She used often to say that purgatory is full of the souls of boys and girls who die at the dawn of reason, because their parents, believing they go to the other world with their innocence, neglect to offer suffrages for their eternal repose.

All these graces were crowned by the Lord with other

extraordinary gifts, such as that of curing and prophecy. We will only give a few instances of the latter. Almost always that any Jesuit of the province of Aragon died, no matter how distant the place was, the servant of God had notice of it, so that her director, on hearing of it from her, offered without hesitation the usual suffrages for his eternal repose. On one occasion when hearing Mass in the professed house of Valencia, she saw one of the fathers, who was then quite well, laid out on the bier; and the good man soon took unwell and died. On another occasion, having gone to visit some nuns, she said to one of them: "How are you getting on with the making of the shroud, mother?" thus indicating that she should prepare for death. The religious, thinking she was joking, answered: "Slowly, indeed, Geronima." "Then, mother, make haste with it, for you must go soon, and I shall follow after." And, indeed, the Lord had revealed to her the hour of her death. The day of the Purification of Our Blessed Lady our Saviour manifested to her that He wished to take her from this exile and bring her to eternal rest. Hearing this news, she bid good-bye to her friends as if she were going on a journey; she visited, for the last time, some churches and images of her special devotion, and was then attacked with her last illness. During it she persisted in her prophecy, and prepared her soul for the last struggle. Full of virtues and merit, at fifty-five years of age, she went, as piously believed, to glory, on the 15th of April, 1732, being Easter Tuesday, on which morning she received the Communion on that day given to the sick. Happy those who, in imitation of this humble virgin, earnestly promote the glory of God and the good of souls. On her second anniversary a long panegyric was preached on her by Father Blas Cazorra, of the Society of Jesus, rector of the College and University of Gandia, from which we have extracted the edifying facts we have related.

Reading from the History of the Holy Family.

FROM THE TIME THAT JESUS DROVE THE SELLERS FROM THE TEMPLE TO THE SER- MON ON THE MOUNT.

FROM Cana Jesus went to Capharnaum, where He passed a few days with His beloved Mother and His disciples. But his stay in this place could not be long, as the pasch was coming on, and He should go to Jerusalem to celebrate it according to custom. There He was anxious to preach the good news; and, having entered into the temple, and found merchants buying and selling all classes of animals destined for the sacrifice, oxen, sheep, and doves, and the bankers seated at their tables of exchange, as if it were a public market; filled with holy indignation at sight of the temple profaned, He made a scourge of little cords and drove them all out of the sanctuary, and overturned the tables with the money, exclaiming: "Take these things hence, and make not the house of my father a house of traffic." His burning zeal would not allow the temple consecrated to prayer and the divine worship to be turned into a den of usurers and thieves. Those divine eyes manifested a dignity more than human, and hence all rushed out filled with dread; only a few, more daring than the others, asked Him: "What sign dost Thou show unto us, seeing Thou dost these things?" Jesus answered: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews exclaimed, in mockery: "Six and forty years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou raise it up in three days?" But Jesus, though with the infinite power of

His arm He could restore it in an instant, did not, however, speak of the material edifice, but of the august temple of His body. And so, when He arose on the third day after His death, His disciples remembered this prophecy.

In every age the fear of the sarcasm, or the irony, or the calumny of viper tongues, has been to many a stumbling-block, preventing them from doing that which their heart approved of. This very dread kept many back from embracing the doctrine of Jesus, to the evident risk of their eternal ruin, though His sanctity and sweetness, backed by unheard of prodigies, strongly impelled their souls to renounce the world and to follow the teaching of the Messias. This explains how—though not a few, observing the miracles wrought by the Lord in confirmation of the Gospel, believed in His name and publicly subjected reason to the yoke of faith—amongst the timid believers there was a Pharisee called Nicodemus, who, through human respect, went by night to see Jesus and to be instructed in the new law. But not, therefore, was he rejected by the Divine Pastor, who came to collect the scattered sheep of the house of Israel; on the contrary, with that charity and meekness with which He drew hearts to Him, He began to expound to him the mystery of the regeneration of man by holy baptism: “Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.” He also spoke to him of the bloody crucifixion with which the Jews were to take His life. And He added, for our consolation, that as the Jews, by looking at the brazen serpent raised by Moses in the desert, were cured of the bites of the venomous serpents, so also those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Author and Perfector of our hope, shall be cured of the bite of the infernal serpent. “For God,” added He, “sent not his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world may be saved by Him. He that believeth in Him is not judged. But he that doth not

believe is already judged; because he believeth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Hence we see that salvation is not given without our co-operation, and a lively faith is required to attain it. Such are the principles of the Divine Master with regard to the necessity of faith, which, if it be not accompanied by good works, is a dead faith, and serves in hell as an indelible mark of eternal ignominy for those who had abundance of light but yet preferred to walk in darkness.

Having thus inaugurated the preaching of the doctrine of salvation, Jesus began to administer baptism to His disciples, not a sterile baptism like that of John, but a baptism which infused sanctifying grace into those who worthily received it. The admirers of the Precursor were alarmed at sight of this new baptism, and ran to their master to tell him of all Jesus was doing. "Master," said they, "He who was with thee beyond the Jordan baptiseth, and all men come to Him." The saint answered: "You yourselves bear me witness that I said: I am not Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that cometh from above, is above all. He that is of the earth, of the earth he is, and of the earth he speaketh. He that cometh from heaven, is above all. He must increase and I must decrease. He that believeth in the Son hath life everlasting; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Neither humiliation nor threats could repress his burning zeal. Herod, the tetrarch, lived scandalously with Herodias, his brother's wife. John could not contain his indignation at sight of such a crime, and declaimed against the obscene prince, who, embittered by his just recriminations, took the zealous apostle of penance prisoner and put him in jail. Such is the lot of the preachers of virtue when immoral and infidel people are in power. On that Jesus retired to Galilee, which was subject to Philip, because He feared, and with good reason, that the Pharisees, His sworn ene-

mies, would incite Pilate to seize Him also, under pretext that He was driving the people to sedition, for they followed Him in great crowds.

In making this journey He had to pass by Samaria. The road was long. He reached Sichar, where there was a famous well, called the well of Jacob, who, according to tradition, had dug it to water his flocks. Jesus felt fatigued, and having sent His disciples to the town to buy some food, He sat down near the mouth of the well to rest. Just then a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and our Lord asked her for a drink. "How dost thou," said the woman, "being a Jew, ask me to drink, who am a Samaritan woman?" She spoke thus on account of the deadly hatred which existed between the Samaritans and the Jews. Jesus answered: "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who He is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." "Sir," said the woman, "Thou hast nothing wherein to draw, and the well is deep: from whence, then, hast thou living water?" Jesus answered: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but he that shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall not thirst for ever. But the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting." Such is the water of grace and charity, with which we can sanctify all our works. "Sir," said the woman, "give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come hither to draw." Our Lord changed the conversation, that He might the more easily gain that soul, and told her to go and call her husband. She answered: "I have no husband." Jesus answered: "Thou hast said well, I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands: and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." She confessed that He had spoken the truth, and said she saw He was a prophet, and then added: "Our fathers adored on this mountain, and you say that Jerusalem is the place

where men must adore." "Woman," answered Jesus, "believe me that the hour cometh, when you shall neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, adore the Father. You adore that which you know not: we adore that which we know, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeketh such to adore him. God is spirit, and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth." The woman then said: "I know that the Messiah cometh (who is called Christ), therefore when He come He will tell us all things." And Jesus, answering, said to her: "I am He who am speaking with thee." Just then the disciples returned, and were surprised to find Him talking to a woman alone: such was the guard and modesty ordinarily observed by our Saviour in His conduct among men. However, no one expressed his astonishment. But the poor woman dropped her pitcher, and ran off to the town in great glee to tell the good news,

"Come," she said to the people, "come and see a man who has told me all things whatsoever I have done." In the meantime the disciples prayed Jesus to eat of what they had brought, and He answered that He had other food which they knew not of." And they said to each other: "Hath any man brought Him to eat?" To which Jesus answered: "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent me, that I may perfect his work." He was consumed with zeal for the divine glory, and seeing the hearts well disposed, the fields already white and ready for the reaper, He complained of the scarcity of evangelical workers, and He asked them to pray to the Lord to send helpers to His vineyard.

The men of Samaria were moved by the relation of the prodigies of the Saviour recounted to them by the woman, and ran in crowds to see the Divine Master. The Lord received them all with the charity of a father,

and when He opened His lips and taught them His celestial doctrines, they were so taken by His maxims, that they entreated Him to remain with them. He willingly accepted their invitation, and remained two days in Sichar, cultivating these docile hearts. "We now believe," said they to the woman, "not for thy saying: for we ourselves have heard Him, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."

Full of sacred booty, Jesus left Sichar and went to Galilee, where He commenced His preaching, exciting admiration as well by His miracles as by His portentous wisdom. He went to Nazareth, his own country, and entered the synagogue, according to custom. On these occasions the Jews were accustomed to read some chapter of the Sacred Scriptures, and then the highest in authority, from age or learning, taking the book, interpreted what was read. Jesus was known by His doctrine, and after the usual ceremonies He took the book of Isaias, which was handed to Him, and, opening it, He found this passage, which He read to the congregation: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, wherefore He hath anointed me, to preach the gospel to the poor He hath sent me, to heal the contrite of heart. To preach deliverance to the captives and sight to the blind . . ." He closed the book, and, returning it to the minister, began to interpret this passage. All had their eyes on Him, anxious to hear what He was going to say. "This day," He exclaimed, "is fulfilled this Scripture in your ears." And He spoke with such mastery, that, on hearing the torrents of wisdom which flowed from his lips, they asked one another: "Is not this the son of Joseph?" They were scandalised at the lowliness of His origin, and were consequently deprived of seeing the miracles of the Saviour. To such a pitch did the hardness of their hearts reach, that when He said that a prophet was not honoured in his own country, they were filled with rage, they cast Him out of the city, and carried Him to the brow of a hill to

precipitate Him. But Jesus, passing through their midst without being seen, retired to Capharnaum, where, it appears, He took up His ordinary residence. His zeal, however, did not allow Him to seek rest or to remain long in any place, but He went about, preaching everywhere the approach of the kingdom of heaven and the establishment of His Church. His fame spread in all directions, and from all parts came the people to hear Him and to have their sick cured.

When passing again through Cana, a certain ruler besought Him to come and cure a son he had sick in Capharnaum. "Unless you see signs and wonders you believe not." "Lord," said the ruler, "come down before my son dies." Jesus answered: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." The man believed what Jesus said to him, and returned home; but before he reached his house, his servants came running to tell him the good news that the sick boy was free from the fever, and was cured at the seventh hour of the day. This was the very hour at which Jesus had said that his son lived. The Lord pursued his course, accompanied by Peter and Andrew, and He saw the brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were in a boat with their father, mending their nets. He called them, and they, leaving all, followed Him.

Great was the following of Jesus, and no less the rage of Satan on seeing that so many broke the chains of sin. Our Lord was one Sabbath teaching in the synagogue, with that religious authority and liberty peculiarly His own, when a man possessed by the evil spirit began to cry out: "What have we to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." The Lord rebuked him, and said: "Hold thy peace and go out of him." At this command the spirit threw the man down and went out of him. "What is this?" said the spectators. "What doctrine and what power is this which even the infernal spirits cannot resist?" When

He left the synagogue He went to Simon's house, whose mother-in-law was ill of a fever. He took her hand, and, by only touching it, she was instantly cured. Then they brought to Him all the sick and possessed of the village, and He cured all by simply imposing hands on them. When the devils found themselves cast out they shouted by the mouth of those they were in possession of: "Thou art the Son of God!" But Jesus, reprehending them, imposed silence on them. We should never end if we followed the Saviour, step by step, in His excursions through the towns and villages where He preached penance and announced the kingdom of God, surrounded everywhere by an unusual multitude of people, anxious to hear His salutary teaching. We can only touch on a few of the principal ones. He one time was on the shore of the lake of Genesareth, and such was the crowd that came to hear His doctrine, that, in order to address them with more convenience, He had to get into a boat belonging to Simon, and speak to them from it. When the sermon was over, He said to Peter: "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." "Master," answered Simon, "we have laboured all night and have taken nothing, but at thy word I will let down the net." They did as Jesus told them, and so extraordinary was the take that their nets were breaking, and they were obliged to call for the assistance of their companions in the other boat, and the two vessels were loaded to the water's edge. Peter was beyond himself when he saw this prodigy. When he made fast his boat, he ran and threw himself at the feet of Jesus, and, with profound humility, said: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But the Divine Saviour, full of goodness, addressed these words to him: "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men."



ST. MARTIN.

LIGHT FROM THE LOWLY.

Series V.

ST. ISIDORE AND ST. MARY, FARMERS.

I.

THE year 1622 was for Catholic Spain a year of enthusiastic jubilee. All her towns and villages rejoiced at the peaceful conquest of virtue gained when Gregory XV. added five new names to the roll of saints, all of whom were Spaniards, except St. Philip Neri. They were Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Apostle of the Indies; Teresa of Jesus, reformer of the Order of Carmel; and our simple and exemplary Isidore. They were canonised on the 12th of March of the above year.

Madrid, which from time immemorial, venerated the mortal remains of the humble farmer, transformed into an enchanted garden, celebrated its patron's canonisation with transports of devotion. In all directions were seen wreaths of laurel and flowers, rich tapestries, triumphal arches, and crystalline fountains. The night of the 20th of June was turned into day by the general illu-

mination. But the greatest devotion of the faithful was excited by the magnificent procession, in which the saint's relics were carried, and in which all the guilds and societies of the city joined. Six hundred priests, in measured strains, celebrated the glories of the renowned confessor. Philip IV. and all his court, in extraordinary gala dress, followed the triumphal car, which, without counting the workmanship, was worth sixteen thousand ducados; and then came numerous squadrons of horse and foot, waving the standards taken from the Moors in the battle of Navas de Tolosa,—a battle, some say, gained through the protection of our saint. Passing over these uncertain titles to devotion and enthusiasm, someone may ask to what did the humble farmer owe those glorious rejoicings, the pallid reflection of the glory he enjoys in heaven? To this Christian question, the Bull of canonisation answers “that it was in digging and ploughing the earth the prudent labourer found the treasure of divine grace, with which he purchased the principality of heavenly glory.” The way in which he found the vein of this inestimable treasure we may learn from the edifying examples he left us during his mortal career.

Isidore was born in Madrid of poor but Christian parents, from whom, along with the rudiments of faith, he learned an unlimited confidence in Divine Providence. He was by profession a farmer, simple, devout, God-fearing, amiable, and indulgent to all. Engaged at work the whole week, on Sundays he went to the Benedictine Convent to hear from the lips of the religious the explanation of eternal truths, which, during his hours of labour, served as food for his soul, a lamp in his undertakings, and an efficacious medicine in his ills. With this avidity and diligence, the germs of the piety planted in his soul by his good parents struck deep root in his heart; above all, his tender devotion to

Jesus crucified, and the Virgin of Sorrows, perfect examples of resignation and patience, living books in which Isidore studied the science of the saints, that is, a love of things eternal, and a contempt for all things fleeting and perishing. Not through carnal desires, but in obedience to the voice of God, our saint contracted marriage with Maria Torribia. Maria's place of birth is not certainly known, several villages around Madrid disputing this honour. It is beyond doubt, however, that she was reared in the holy fear of God, and assiduously cultivated the virtues becoming a truly Christian girl. Like the man the Lord had destined for her consort, she was simple, humble, devout, industrious, and anxious to obey the divine will in all things. She consequently sanctified the festival days, and attended, with fervour and constancy, not only at the explanation of the Christian doctrine, but also the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and, as far as she could, frequented the holy sacraments.

II.

The Lord united these two candid souls, so similar in their aspirations and sentiments, in the holy bonds of matrimony. Following the advice of St. Paul, who tells the faithful to work with their hands in order to assist the poor and fly from idleness, the mother of all vices, they were always attached to labour, and lived content in gaining the necessaries of life with the sweat of their brow. But they were never blinded by an immoderate desire of heaping up riches, which are dissipated in the twinkling of an eye : they preferred eternal treasures to the material and fleeting ones of this world. Hence their first and principal occupation was the affair of the eternal salvation of their souls. They got up very early in the morning ; and every day before Isidore

engaged in the work of the fields and Maria in her domestic duties, they went to Mass and to visit some churches, fervently recommending themselves to God, and treating with Him of man's most important business—the salvation of his soul. The Lord, on His part, looked after their interests.

Notwithstanding that they went to work a little later than their neighbours, they laboured so hard that they had more done at the end of the day than the others; for, besides their diligence, they always counted on the Lord's aid, who watches with singular providence over those who are faithful in His service. And so their fields were better cared and their crops more abundant. It appears they lived the first years of their married life in Madrid, where a son was born to them, whom, like good Christians, they reared up in the holy fear of God. Here they entered into service as land-stewards to a gentleman, named Iban de Vargas. Soon black envy dogged their steps. The tenants, finding that our saint's fields were better cultivated than theirs, though he spent less time at work, began to grieve over the prosperity of the servant of God, and tried to put between him and his master. "Sir," said one of them, who had the boldness to accuse Isidore, "sir, as a good tenant of yours, I must tell you that Isidore goes to work very late, and spends his time making the rounds of churches instead of minding his business. If you do not see after it, your property will be ruined."

The master, in a rage, went to Isidore and bitterly reprehended him, telling him he should not neglect his duty for his devotions, which, of course, was perfectly true, for duty is before devotion. At the same time we should not take advantage of this fact to neglect our pious practices, for which we can always find time after complying with our obligations. The saint bore the reprimand patiently, but said he could not and would

not for all the wealth of the world neglect his devotional exercises; but if his master, in the judgment of a skilled farmer, had suffered any loss, he would make it good, as he should be sorry to do an injustice to any man. The gentleman was calmed by this answer, though not quite convinced, and resolved to keep his eyes open for the future and see what was going on.

III.

The Lord never abandons His own when persecuted for justice' sake. Iban went one day to the fields and found that really Isidore did come late to work, which the saint never denied. When biding his time to scold him, he saw, to his surprise, two pairs of oxen, white as snow, ploughing on either side of Isidore. Mary, his wife, who came with his breakfast, also saw this wonderful sight. Iban de Vargas, in wonder, went to investigate the matter, but when he reached the place, he was still more astonished to find only his servant, and Mary, who had brought him his breakfast. He asked the saint who were the young men who were ploughing with him on either side. Isidore answered: "There has been nobody here, sir, except myself and the Lord, whom I invoke at my work, and His mercy and protection never fail me." The gentleman was convinced that God's angels assisted his servant, and supplied any loss occasioned by his devotions. "Isidore," he said to him, "I shall pay no attention to talk and complaints about you henceforth. Do as you wish from this on, for I confidently place my property in your hands." The two exemplary spouses were grateful for this unlimited confidence put in them, and resolved never to abandon their holy tenor of life. They consequently continued to hear Mass, to say their usual prayers, to daily offer up their works to God, and to

keep themselves in His presence by holy aspirations to Jesus and Mary, whose protection never failed them in their tribulations and necessities.

A proof of this special providence was the following miracle: One day in summer he tied his ass outside, and went into the Church of St. Mary Magdalen to pray as usual. A wolf came and attacked the poor animal. Some boys, who saw it, ran in alarm to warn the saint, but he quietly told them not to mind, "Let God's will be done." When he finished his prayers and went out, he found the wolf dead and his ass in harness, for which he again returned to the church to give God thanks.

And how could the Lord refuse His special protection to a servant so liberal and generous to the poor? Like Tobias, he had formed the resolution of assisting the indigent as far as his means would allow—that is, to give abundant alms if he had much, and if little to divide that little with them; and in case he had nothing, to show them some kindness in word or deed. Guided by these charitable principles, he gave away more than he could conveniently spare, stimulated by the wonders with which God encouraged his compassionate charity. He was accustomed to distribute more than usual on Saturdays, in honour of the Blessed Virgin, who loves us all so dearly. On one occasion, after giving away all the soup he had, another poor person appeared looking for an alms. Having nothing to give him, he told his wife, for God's sake, to hand him some of the meat, if any remained. She knew that there was nothing, and went to the kitchen to show her husband the empty pot; but, to her great surprise, she found it as full as it originally was, and she gave plenty to the beggar and to others who came after him, thanking and praising God for all His mercies. And this was not the only one of the Lord's miracles.

IV.

He was a member of a religious confraternity, the members of which used to dine together on a certain day each year. Isidore once failed to be present at the hour named, having spent too much time in the churches, but his companions reserved his share of the feast for him. Knowing this, he invited a number of beggars to share it with him, and when the servant went to bring it, to his intense astonishment he found the dish full of meat, more than sufficient for all. The saint and his guests gave thanks to God for his mercies, and immediately after went to the church to renew them. It cost him little, someone may say, when the Lord met the expense. But not always so, for often he deprived himself of what he gave to the poor. And the spirit of mercy was so strong in him that he would pity the wants of the little birds of the air. One winter day he was going in the snow with wheat to the mill, when he met a flock of famished pigeons. Taking compassion on them, he cleared away a good patch of snow, and threw wheat on it for the poor things. He was reproached for this waste by a man who was also going to the mill; but on their arrival, the latter, to his great astonishment, found Isidore's sacks as full as if none had been taken out of them.

Who, after all this, would not expect Isidore's life to be one of smiles and favours from heaven? But no; the cross is the patrimony of good Christians, and so bitterness and tribulations were not wanting to him to offer to Him who died an ignominious death for us. Not the least of them was what happened in his child's case. The poor thing accidentally fell into a deep well, and his mother, regarding him as dead, weeping, called her husband. Both went on their knees to beseech the Lord to assist them in their affliction. The Lord heard

their prayers, for immediately the water began to rise in the well, carrying on its surface the poor child, whom his father rescued safe and sound. No need to say the saint blessed the God of mercy for this prodigy. In the meantime they lived together in peace and mutual forbearance, husband and wife regarding each other as the representative of God, whose will they tried to consult in all their actions and enterprises. Bleda and other biographers, supported by constant tradition, mention several other wonders wrought by the saint.

V.

He says that Isidore was going one day with Iban de Vargas to see his property, and, being very thirsty from fatigue, the master asked his servant if there were any water about. The saint pointed out a place where there was a spring. Thither went the master, but, finding it completely dry, he complained that the saint had made a fool of him. Isidore ran with his goad, and, like another Moses, struck the hard ground with it, saying: "There is water here, if it is God's will," and immediately a spring of clear water burst from the earth, and remains to the present day. Elizabeth, wife of Charles V. and mother of Philip II., built a church over it. Many other fountains and springs are attributed to the intervention of St. Isidore.

The master of the servant of God had an only daughter, named Mary, and she fell ill and died. Isidore, on his return from the fields, taking pity on her parents' affliction, began to pray, and, laying his hand on the girl, to the great wonder of all restored her to life. And this was only one of many prodigies wrought by God on his behalf. He was even carried to heaven in spirit, and in ecstasy contemplated the divine mysteries. No

wonder he should be full of piety and devotion. No wonder, either, that his wife should try to vie with him by imitating his virtues. In this saintly way they lived some years in Madrid, till they removed to Caraquiz, of which place, according to some, Mary was a native, and there they became living models for all the families about, and there, also, under their new master, several prodigies occurred.

VI.

One soon tires of the goods of earth, and becomes satiated with the pleasures of the world, but the hunger of sanctity in the heart of the just never cries enough. Some say that for some time they were faithful imitators of Joseph and Mary in their married life, and now by mutual consent they separated, Mary remaining in Caraquiz, and Isidore going to Tordelaguna, where he entered the service of another master. His wife, in the meantime, took care of a small church, which afterwards was called Saint Mary de la Cabeza. She begged alms to keep it in proper order, and took care that a lamp should burn night and day before the Queen of Heaven. In this she found her happiness, and she availed herself of everything she saw and did to keep her heart more and more united to God and the Blessed Virgin. The streams, the birds, the stars, all things contributed to this, for every creature invited her to love the Creator. In the meantime her husband was daily growing more pleasing in the sight of God, who, on His part, gave unequivocal proofs of the esteem He had for His servant, such as increasing his wheat when he prayed for it for the poor. The devil now tried to excite discord between husband and wife, and availed himself of evil tongues to inspire Isidore with doubts of his wife's fidelity; but

God soon dissipated them in a wonderful manner, and proved her complete innocence. But this did not put an end to evil talk, which Mary bore with meekness and patience; whilst her husband now believed it not, but deeply felt the offence her detractors were offering to God. He knew that the Lord loved them, and this was sufficient for him. But God often permits calumny and slander to purify just souls with the myrrh of tribulation.

Isidore, now ripe for heaven, joyfully foresaw that the time of his departure from this vale of tears was approaching, and prepared himself to go to receive his crown and the hundred-fold of all the treasures he had placed in the hands of the poor of Jesus Christ. His was the death of the just, precious in the Lord's sight. He devoutly received the last sacraments, and exhorting all to live in the practice of virtue, making acts of faith, hope, charity, and contrition, and joining his hands peacefully and devoutly, he delivered up his spirit to his Creator, whom he had so fervently served in his mortal career. He died about the year 1130, on the 28th of November, according to Pseudo-Juliano.

He was buried in St. Andrew's cemetery in Madrid, which was the church most frequently visited by the saint. After forty years his body was exhumed and found intact. It was translated to the church, and the Lord worked many miracles through his intercession, which caused devotion to him to spread rapidly among the people. After his death his devout widow retired to Caraquiz, and did not return to Madrid, except to visit the church of Atocha and that of Our Lady of Almu-
dena. She was a model for holy widows by her piety, love of retirement, modesty, industry, contempt of the world, and her charity to the poor. It is not known how long she survived her husband, or what became of their son, though some say he died before his parents.

It was also unknown where Mary's remains resd

except that they were laid in the church of which she had care. She appeared one night to Francis de las Cuevas, and told him that her body was buried in the sacristy of the church. An examination was made, and there it was discovered, and immediately the place was filled with sweet aroma. This was in March, 1596, and in 1615 the venerable remains were translated to the convent of St. Francis in Tordelaguna. There was great rejoicing in Madrid when the news arrived of Isidore's beatification, which Paul V. proclaimed on the 14th of June, 1619, at the request of Philip III., and the clergy and corporation of the city. The Pope appointed the 15th of May as his feast, though there was an ancient custom of celebrating it on the 30th of November. The Lord performed numerous miracles in his honour, curing the sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and even the king himself was restored to health by touching his relics.



BLESSED SEBASTIAN DE APARICIO, GARDENER, ROAD-MAKER, AND CARMAN.

I.

IN Gudina, a little village of Galicia between the rivers Fraga and Ribeira, a really picturesque spot on the division line between the dioceses of Astorga and Orense, there lived, at the beginning of the sixteenth century an humble and pious family blessed by the Lord with a son, whom his countrymen were afterwards to see elevated to the honours of our altars. It was composed of Julian de Aparicio and Teresa del Prado, the parents of our hero, whose name was Sebastian. Though both were

poor they yet knew how to enrich their children with the most precious of all treasures, which is virtue. And, indeed, they had need of it to bear the crosses which, as to predilect children, the Father of mercies sent them, not the least of which was to see their third child, Sebastian, attacked by the plague, which in 1514 decimated Galicia. He was twelve years of age when he was thus driven from his parents' side and compelled to live in a solitary hut, lest the other members of the family might be infected. There young Aparicio spent days and nights without more company than that of his angel guardian, daily expecting death to come and end his painful illness. But, at the same time, he did not want the necessaries of life, for his loving mother, like an anxious dove, would fly to her child's nest, and knocking at the door tell him she there left what he required. The Lord never abandons His own; and not seldom takes advantage of human errors to make his beneficent providence more apparent. Thus did it happen with our patient youth. He was accustomed to only leave his retreat to take the provisions his mother left for him, and then return to his cabin to be free from the wolves with which the neighbourhood was infested. Weakened by sickness and acute pain, he one day forgot to secure the door, when unexpectedly a ravenous wolf entered and bit a tumour he had on his head. After opening it and sucking the poisonous matter, he gently licked the sore, and left the boy whole and sound. Such was the unexpected surgeon the Father of the poor sent to cure him. This event, so evidently providential or prodigious, restored him to liberty and the bosom of his afflicted family. His religious parents never ceased to bless and praise God for this singular favour, and took more pains than ever to rear up in a Christian manner the child whom the Lord had preserved by a miracle

Sebastian proved himself no less grateful to God

and his parents, acting the part of a true son to the latter, and faithfully attending to all their commands; and, with regard to the Almighty, giving an edifying example of fervour and devotion in the exact fulfilment of his religious duties. During the time he remained with his Christian family, whether engaged in caring a small number of cattle, or in the work of the fields, he learned to unite prayer to labour, to frequently offer his toil to the King of glory, to daily say the holy Rosary in honour of the Immaculate Virgin, and to often raise his heart to God in fervent ejaculations. When the time came for him to procure a decent livelihood by his own exertions, he resolved, with his father's blessing, to leave his own country, like many of his neighbours, and go to a strange one to push his fortune. How many, alas! when abandoning their own home for the same purpose, forget the good maxims and drop the pious practices they had learned in it; and giving themselves up to a dissipated, perhaps a licentious life, instead of the wealth they sought find only the eternal death of their souls! This did not happen in Sebastian's case. Resolved never, on any account, to abandon the exercise of piety he had learned from his parents, he went first to Salamanca, where he entered the service of a noble widow. Then he went to Estremadura, and got employment in Don Pedro Figueroa's house, and finally settled down in Sanlucar de Barrameda, entering the service of a widow with two daughters. Everywhere he tried to regulate his life according to his early training: he avoided idleness, bad company, the tavern, and other dangerous places. He daily placed himself under the protection of the Queen of Angels and the saints, for whom he had a special devotion, and never omitted the holy Rosary, or to approach the sacraments, as far as his duties permitted.

II.

But the devil laid snares for his virtue, and to preserve his innocent purity he resolved on flight, which is the surest means of victory in contests of this kind. A farmer's life, to which he had been reared, appeared to him freer from danger than life in a town; and as he had by hard work and economy saved some small capital, he made up his mind to take a little farm that would give him employment the whole year round. He found a place to his taste, situated in a lonely spot and provided with a cabin sufficient for all his wants. Thither the chaste youth went to reside, as if he were returning to paradise lost.

And then indeed his heart enjoyed true peace and solid content. Engaged on his manual labour, in all things he found means to raise his mind to the God of mercies. The birds, as well as the insects, the hard rocks equally with the crystalline fountains, the fragrant flowers and the dry trunks, the rain, the sunshine, all the spectacles of nature, were monitors which told him to intone canticles of praise to the Creator of such wonders, who had freed him from the captivity of Babylon and placed him in this garden of delights. The sanctification of his soul, the cultivation of his land, the relief of the poor, these were his sole occupation and care. And in the midst of these duties, united to the consideration of eternal truths and the mysteries of our holy religion, he felt his soul so filled with benedictions that he would not have changed his state for any other in the world, Sebastian was a model of innocence, simplicity, modesty, industry, recollection, and all virtues, to the inhabitants of the district. As true sanctity admirably harmonises with industry and labour, he cultivated his farm with such care and solicitude that, with the blessing of

heaven, his fields produced much more than they ever did before, and this his neighbours often wondered at.

Nor is virtue opposed to a moderate desire of improving one's fortune, if it be ordained to an honest and Christian end. Guided by this principle, Sebastian continued for some years to increase his capital, without forgetting the relief of the poor, to whom he always gave in proportion to his harvest. But hearing people talk of the richness and fertility of Mexico, or New Spain, he formed the intention of going to it to admire the Lord's magnificence so lavishly displayed in His creatures. For this purpose he determined on selling his things and embarking at once for America, recommending to the Lord, by day and by night, a matter of such importance.

III.

There lived in Ayamonte, a place not far distant from Sebastian's, a young dependent of the owner of the village. A young girl belonging to one of the most respectable families fell madly in love with him, and they mutually promised to marry. But as they knew her relatives would not hear of such a thing, they were in great difficulty as to how to carry out their purpose, and seeing no other means of effecting it, they determined on flight. They started off together, but being hotly pursued, they were at last driven to take refuge in Sebastian's cabin, thus eluding their pursuers, not, however, without previously undergoing great privations and hardships in their journey. Unhappy the girl who thus exposes her temporal and eternal welfare! Sooner or later the man will grow weary of her and the trouble she caused him, and will seek means to be rid of her. And so it happened in this poor creature's case.

They entered the cabin, and finding the servant of

God at home, the young man said to him: "I beseech you, brother, for the love of God, to receive and keep in your own house, as your own sister, this poor young girl, for I am obliged to leave her to escape from the hands of those who pursue me. Do this act of charity and you shall have a reward from heaven." Sebastian, who had ever words of consolation for the afflicted, and never allowed an opportunity of serving his neighbour to pass, thus answered this unexpected request: "As I have no other interest in doing what you ask than to serve my Lord God, you may leave her and I will care her as a sister." The young man breathed as if a great weight were lifted off his heart, and leaving the unfortunate girl in charge of an unknown man, went his way and abandoned her.

Sebastian, knowing the difficulties of his perilous situation, took every precaution that the breath of scandal should not be raised against them, and for that purpose completely abandoned his house to her after his hours of labour, and sought accommodation for himself elsewhere. But all this not appearing enough, he made up his mind to carry out his intention of going to America. So, calling her one day, he explained to her that he had put off his journey up to this in order to be of service to her, but was now determined to do so no longer. Hearing from her, then, for the first time, the history of her flight, he went to her friends and told them where she was; they came to her place of refuge, and when Sebastian was delivering her up to them he told them how the young man had entrusted her to his charge, and how he had faithfully complied with his request, treating her in all things as if she had been his own sister. Her relatives knew not how to thank the gardener for his noble and Christian conduct, and were anxious to give him some suitable reward, but the humble servant of God firmly refused to receive anything from

them, as he had done all for the love of God. Her relatives then took her home, convinced now, we are sure, that girls should not put belief in vain and fleeting promises.

IV.

As for Sebastian, being now free from all embarrassment, he grew daily more active and fervent in the service of God, and determined to carry out at once the plans with which he believed the Lord had inspired him. He gave proper notice to his landlord of his intention of giving up the farm, and after making due preparation for his journey, embarked for the West Indies at the age of thirty years, replete with merit and virtues. Our traveller was far from thinking of the lofty designs Divine Providence had in view in sending him to countries so remote. His own principal object was to procure enough to pass his old age decently, and have a larger amount to give to the poor; and the Lord's was that he might improve those new Christians, not by his learning and science, but, as the decree of beatification says, by the practical example of his humility and every kind of virtue. After a favourable voyage he reached New Spain, or Mexico, in 1533, the eleventh year after its conquest by the Spaniards. He landed at Vera Cruz, and fixed his residence not far from Puebla de los Angeles, where he commenced the reclamation of some virginal soil.

Our farmer was surely overjoyed at the permanent spring-like appearance of the country, and thanked God for allotting to man so beautiful a dwelling. He grew enthusiastic over the picturesque scenery, the high mountains, the undulating plains, the broad rivers, the crystalline fountains, the rich plumaged birds and

glowing insects. How often would he cross the deep Stoyac and visit the Babel of the New World, that magnificent pyramid on which is perched the sanctuary of the Virgin of Remedies, surrounded by cypresses! Here, with his beads in his hand, he would mount the hundred and twenty steps to the broad platform of five thousand square yards, and bless his venerated and beloved Lady, while admiring the vast unbroken plain. But let us return to his domestic labours.

Herds of wild, untamed cattle wandered over these prairies, which no one had yet dared to domesticate, or accustom to farm work. Sebastian, knowing the great advantage it would be to the inhabitants to do so, essayed the task with great success. In a short time, with the help of God, whom he consulted in all his undertakings, he had some few of them prepared for the plough. After subduing a sufficient number for his own purposes, he continued the task, to the great astonishment and advantage of the people of the surrounding villages, who could not but wonder at the facility with which he succeeded in doing what they never dared to attempt. This, together with his amiability to all, the promptness with which he attended to the wants of others, the fervour and zeal he displayed in God's service, on one hand, gained him the hearts of Indians and Spaniards, and, on the other, practically showed all how industry can be united to a faithful compliance with Christian doctrine. These favourable results inspired him with new enterprises for the common benefit, whilst he endeavoured to please God in all things, and promote the glory of Jesus, the only object of his love, and the sweetness of his soul.

V.

Observing the difficulty of carrying merchandise from the seaports to the interior, he resolved to establish a regular service of carts for the purpose. And this resolution he came to, despite the immense difficulties that lay in his road in the shape of lofty mountains, immense plains, deep rivers, and other almost insuperable obstacles. But what cannot a decided will accomplish? In a short time the streets of Mexico were traversed by his carts, to the great astonishment of the inhabitants, who up to then had never seen such vehicles on their roads. They found Sebastian's convoy, who, after giving an order to a friend for the carts, had gone on to the capital to offer his services to the royal ministers on behalf of those who were working the mines of Santa Maria de Zacatecas. Convinced of the utility of the idea, and the great advantages that should spring from it, as well in the interests of commerce as of the royal treasury, the ministers accepted the offer of the servant of God, and took him into the public service at a high salary. But how was it possible to utilise those vehicles in a virgin country totally unprovided with roads? So the first thing Sebastian had to do to carry out his undertaking was to open a means of communication between Mexico and Zacatecas, and between Zacatecas and Puebla. These towns were soon blessed with commodious roads, in the laying out of which Sebastian discovered a talent far above what might be expected from an uneducated man. He himself superintended the works, and often drove the carts with his goad in one hand and his beads in the other. God blessed his industry and piety; for notwithstanding his large alms to the poor, his means rapidly increased, and he appeared to have struck an inex-

haustible mine. God was repaying him the hundred-fold for what he bestowed on the needy.

His industry, charity, humility, and Christian fervour made him beloved, not only by the European settlers, but by the Indians, whom he always treated in so kindly a manner that they looked on him as a father. His company or his recommendation was, as far as they were concerned, a safe-conduct to anyone who wished to visit their settlements. In addition to the virtues mentioned above, he practised patient meekness under reverses; so that if his carts should ever tumble, as sometimes happened, into any of the many ravines which lay in his path, instead of cursing, swearing, and blaspheming, as others do in like circumstances, he called on the sweet names of Jesus and Mary, and under their protection tried to remedy the misfortune. In this way did he pass several years—an example and model to all carmen. But though he acquired wealth at this business, without the slightest infringement of conscience, yet he missed the peace and retirement afforded by his farming life, and so he determined to return to it.

VI.

With this end in view he settled down in Cupelteque, half a league from the capital, where he again began to tame wild cattle and cultivate the land. He employed many hands at this work, and not only looked after their temporal interests, but more particularly those of their souls. His zeal to prevent offences to God is above all praise. He never allowed any of his dependents to commit excess in act or word without instantly correcting him with all kindness and charity, and no one could, or ever did, take offence at his meek rebukes. His inex-

haustible charity and mercy made him the common father of the Spaniards and Indians of Cupelteque. To some he gave food in their distress, to others seed to sow their ground, for others he ploughed their land, to the sick he sent his own labourers to do their work and put in their crop without recompense of any kind, and to needy young girls he gave dowries to enable them to get married: in fine, all who were struggling under the weight of the cross, or were buried in misery, found in him a helper and consoler. And yet, despite this unlimited generosity, his capital daily increased, wealth appearing to have the virtue of multiplying in his hands.

He understood that a family of good birth was reduced to great misery. Thither went the angel of the poor. He supplied all their wants, lent sufficient sums to marry the three daughters, and when the husband died, never demanded the return of one penny from his widow. On another occasion he saw in the streets of Mexico an acquaintance of his in the hands of the police; and on inquiring the cause, he was told it was for a debt of three thousand dollars. He immediately paid the sum, and obtained his friend's release. We should, however, become tedious if we related, one by one, the acts of mercy and generosity he performed. He never summoned his own debtors to the court, and went to the assistance of others who were pushed by their creditors. And yet his means were still increasing, for heaven rained down on him new benedictions day by day.

Sad was the spectacle presented on a certain day by the inhabitants of Cupelteque. Some moped about in a melancholy way; some sat silent at home, others dropped involuntary tears, and it was all because the Lord had visited their common father, the good Sebastian, with a serious illness. The very sun did not appear to shine as usual. The bell announcing the administration of the Viaticum was scarcely heard when the whole village flocked to accompany it to the sick man's house in proof

of their gratitude. All wept over the impending loss of their shield and protector. Sebastian alone, conformable to the Divine Will, tranquilly accepted the blow, and desired to peacefully leave this exile to go to enjoy God for all eternity. Comforted with the last sacraments, he made his will, leaving all his property to pious institutions and his chattels to the poor. But the Father of mercies heard the prayers of the afflicted people, and content with the sacrifice of the will, restored him to health, reserving him for greater things.

Sebastian lived unmarried up to sixty years, but now changed his mind, and took to wife a poor, but very virtuous girl, who, however, died a year after their marriage. He gave back her dowry to her friends, and removed a short distance from Mexico to blunt his grief in some measure. He bought a place at Tlalneplantla, and there commenced again his usual field labours, which he considered so useful to the spiritual advancement of his soul.

VII.

Here he sought and found a new virtuous companion in wedlock ; but his second wife did not live long either. He had gone from home one day, and she, in her anxiety to look for his coming, had got up into a tree for the purpose ; but slipping, or a branch breaking, she fell and received injuries from which, despite all medical skill, the poor young woman died. This new misfortune, however, was not sufficient to make him fail in his practices of piety ; for, on the contrary, realising more keenly the fleetingness of things earthly, he redoubled his efforts to secure the everlasting kingdom. To this end, in dress and food he mortified his tastes, denied his body all comfort and rest, slept but a short time on the hard ground, and missed no opportunity of practising self-denial and penance.

The Lord again visited him with another serious illness, which he received as coming from the hands of God. When he recovered from it, he resolved to think of nothing but the affairs of his soul. Night and day he prayed the Almighty to manifest to him His holy will, that he might fulfil it with all exactness. The Lord wished to transplant that fragrant lily to the garden of religious life, as well for the purpose that the inmates of the convent might admire the sanctity with which Sebastian was able to adorn his soul in the world, as to crown the virtue of the now venerable old man. And so, after six years of prayer and good works the Lord gave him to understand how much He would be pleased to see him in the retirement of the cloister. The fervent Galician was not deaf to the divine voice. Confiding in God, without paying attention to the representations of his friends, he disposed of all his property, and distributed the proceeds to the poor; and then, after various trials and temptations, he became a lay brother in the Mexican convent of St. Francis, on the 9th of June, 1573, at the age of seventy-one years.

VIII.

Here he gave the very religious edification by his attention and diligence in all the duties belonging to his office. Then, by order of his superiors, he went to Santiago de Tecali, and afterwards to Puebla de los Angeles. His duty in this last convent was to collect the alms, which he did going round with his cart, the reins in one hand, his beads in the other. The Lord often favoured him in his excursions with the visit of angels, and bestowed on him the gift of miracles, and other gifts no less extraordinary. But though grateful for them, he did not think much of them,

his whole anxiety being to gather up merits, and daily become more pleasing in the eyes of God by recollection, observance, and penitence. At last, when warned by the Holy Ghost that the end of his long exile was approaching, he prepared for it as if he had to combat with all the powers of hell. He bade good-bye to all, and after fervent acts of faith, hope, charity, and contrition, repeated constantly during the ten days his illness lasted, calling on the sweet names of Jesus and Mary, he exchanged this mortal life for the eternal, after a career of ninety-eight years, replete with victories and deserts. Pius VI., on the 12th of September, 1789, beatified our servant of God. His sepulchre became famous for the many graces obtained by those who implored his intercession.



ST. GODRICK, PEDDLER AND HERMIT.

(From "Butler's Lives of the Saints.")

I.

HE was born of very mean parents, at Walpole, in Norfolk, and in his youth carried about little peddling wares, which he sold in villages. Having by degrees improved his stock, he frequented cities and fairs, and made several voyages by sea to traffic in Scotland. In one of these he called at Holy Island, or Lindisfarne, where he was charmed and exceedingly edified with the retirement and religious deportment of the monks, and especially with the account which they gave him of the wonderful life of St. Cuthbert. He inquired of them every particular relating to him, visited every corner of that holy solitude and of the neighbouring Isle of

Farne, and, falling on his knees, prayed with many tears for grace to imitate the fervour of that saint in serving God, resolving for that purpose to give up all earthly pretensions. He entered on a new course of life by a penitential, devout pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and visited Compostella on his way home. After his return into Norfolk he accepted the charge of house-steward in the family of a very rich man. The servants were not very regular, and for their private junketings often trespassed on their neighbours. Godrick, finding he was not able to prevent these injustices, and that the nobleman took no notice of his complaints about them, being easy as long as he was no sufferer himself, left his place, for fear of being involved in the guilt of such an injustice.

After making a pilgrimage to St. Giles', in France, and to Rome, he went to the north of England, in order the better to carry into execution his design of devoting himself wholly to a retired life. A fervent servant of God, named Godwin, who had passed a considerable time in the monastery of Durham, and by conversing with the most holy monks, and exercising himself in the interior and exterior practices of all virtues, was well qualified to be a director to an inexperienced novice, joined our saint, and they led together an austere anchoretical life in a wilderness situated to the north of Carlisle, serving one another, and spending both the days and nights in the praises of God. After two years God called Godwin to himself by a happy death after a short sickness. St. Godrick, having lost his companion, made a second painful pilgrimage to Jerusalem. After his return he passed some time in the solitude of Streneshalch, now Whitby; but after a year and some months went to Durham to offer up his prayers before the shrine of St. Cuthbert, and from thence retired into the desert of Finchal or Finkley, three miles from Durham, near the river Wear. St. John Baptist and

St. Cuthbert he chose for his principal patrons and models. The austerities which he practised are rather to be admired than imitated. He had his regular tasks of devotion, consisting of psalms and other prayers which he had learned by heart, and which he constantly recited at midnight, break of day, and other canonical hours, besides a great number of other devotions. Though he was ignorant of the very elements of learning, he was too well experienced in the happy art of conversing with God and his own soul ever to be at a loss how to employ his time in solitude. Whole days and nights seemed to be too short for his rapturous contemplations, one of which he often wished, with St. Bruno, he could have continued without interruption for eternity, in inflamed acts of adoration, compunction, love, or praise. His patience under the sharpest pains of sickness or ulcers, and all manner of trials was admirable, but his humility was yet more astonishing. His conversation was meek, humble, and simple. He concealed as much as possible from the sight and knowledge of all men, whatever might procure their esteem; and he was even unwilling that anyone should see or speak with him. Yet, this he saw himself obliged to allow on certain days every week to such as came with the leave of the Prior of Durham, under whose care and obedience he lived. A monk of that house was his confessor, said Mass for him, and administered to him the sacraments in a chapel adjoining to his cell, which the holy man had built in honour of St. John Baptist. He was most averse to all pride and vanity, and never spoke of himself but as the most sinful of creatures, a counterfeit hermit, an empty phantom of a religious man: lazy, slothful, proud, and imperious, abusing the charity of good people who assisted him with their alms. But the more the saint humbled himself the more did God exalt him by his grace and by wonderful miraculous gifts.

A monk of Durham once paid him a visit, and their conversation turned on Thomas à Becket, the illustrious Chancellor of England, who had just been promoted to the archiepiscopal See of Canterbury. The religious asked him if he had any acquaintance with that holy and distinguished ecclesiastic. "With the eyes of the body," said the hermit, "I have never seen him, but with the eyes of the soul I know him well, and could pick him out from a crowd." And then he added, "Your Reverence can carry him a message I have to send him. With my deepest respect, tell him not to forget to carry out what he has resolved on, for it is pleasing to God, though he shall have to suffer for it bitter tribulations. He shall be persecuted, driven from his flock, but in the end will return triumphant to his people." The monk complied with his request, and told the prelate in a letter what passed at his interview with the hermit. The archbishop thanked him and recommended himself to the good man's prayers.

II.

It has always been the misfortune of ambitious governors without the fear of God, and who, in their high positions, regard rather private interests than the prosperity of their people, to put their sickle in the harvest of others, to rob the sanctuary and deprive the pastors of the Church of the free exercise of their sacred functions. One of these was the violent and cruel Henry II. of England. Thomas was raised by his influence to the See of Canterbury, but he soon experienced the truth of our solitary's prophecy. Driven from his flock on account of the firmness with which he defended the rights of the Church and condemned the injustices of the king, veiled under the name of rights,

he was persecuted not only in England but in France, where he had found a charitable asylum. When Henry found that the Cistercians of Pontigny gave hospitality to the persecuted prelate, he threatened their brethren in England with the extinguishment of their Order in that country if Thomas were not expelled from all their houses. Sometime before leaving Pontigny, Thomas sent a messenger to the holy hermit to ask what would be the issue of this afflicting tragedy. "Go," said Godrick, "and tell your prelate to guard himself against vanity from the ovation which in a short time he shall receive from his flock; and let him know that his joy shall soon be turned into grief, for in nine months after his triumphal return he must seal the immunity of the Church with his blood." Terrible was the tempest brewing, and the Lord was thus preparing that magnanimous heart to brave it. The holy prelate, when praying one night in tears at the monastery of Pontigny, for the peace of his flock, heard in confirmation of Godrick's prophecy a voice which clearly and distinctly said to him: "Thomas, Thomas, my Church shall be glorified in thy blood." "Who art thou, Lord," said the saint, "who thus speakest to me?" And the same voice answered: "I am Jesus, Son of the living God, who died for thee." Inundated in a sea of tears, Thomas prepared to give his life for the Spouse of the Immaculate Lamb. And so it happened. After his return to his see, at some hasty remark of the king, several assassins went and murdered the holy archbishop in his own cathedral, on the 29th of December, 1170.

III.

Such were the lamentable events which, according to Godrick's prophecy, were to fill the Church of England,

and even the whole universe, with grief. The holy hermit had the consolation of not having to witness them, as he died on the 25th of May, seven months before they occurred. During the last years of his life he was afflicted with painful ailings, which he bore with edifying joy and conformity to God's will. Reduced to a skeleton, his tongue never ceased repeating the august names of the three Divine Persons: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." A little before he expired he was visited by St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, whom he received with transports of joy, and from whom he heard the news that he should die on the octave of the Ascension of Our Lord. Fortified with all the aid of the Church, and attended by the religious of Durham, at daybreak, on the day foretold by him, he slept the sleep of the just, after thirty-three years of solitary life. His countenance displayed wonderful grace and sweetness. He was buried in the Oratory of St. John Baptist, which he himself had built, where the Lord made his name celebrated by numerous miracles, and which was afterwards transformed into a church under his invocation.



ST. BONIFACE, STEWARD.

I.

INFINITE are the mercies of God; and though it is true that we should not presume on this infinite mercy to continue in our disorders and sins, as the Lord may, on account of this very presumption, cut short the thread of our life and precipitate us into eternal torments, yet it is no less certain that whilst we live that loving Father

is waiting for us, calls at the door of our heart with frequent inspirations, and is always ready to enter and give us the kiss of love and pardon. Happy he who is not deaf to the divine call! An example of this unlimited mercy is the history we are going to relate. At the beginning of the fourth century there lived in Rome a woman named Aglae, young, beautiful, noble, and extremely rich. She was the daughter of Acacius, of senatorial rank, who had been Pro-Consul of the Eternal City. Her wealth was extraordinary. She had three times given, at her own expense, the public games of the capital. She had sixty-three agents of her property subordinated to her steward, Boniface. The love of vanity and of the world had conquered the hearts of both, and brought them to live in scandalous and criminal intercourse. Besides, Boniface was given to drink and other excesses, which contrasted with his natural goodness of heart. He generously helped the poor, and when he found any stranger or pilgrim, he kept him in his house, and cordially assisted him. At night he used to go through the streets and console the afflicted and succour the distressed. He never oppressed his tenants, and if anyone was unable to pay his rent, he used his influence with Aglae to make her extend her liberality and indulgence to him. God has said that charity covereth a multitude of sins; and happy was Boniface, who paid attention to the graces which the prayers of the poor brought to him from heaven.

At last Aglae, touched by divine grace, called her steward, and said to him: "Brother Boniface, you know what crimes we have been guilty of, without thinking there was a God above us, to whom we shall have to render a strict account of our actions. I have heard from some Christians that the persons who honour those who suffer for Jesus Christ shall become participators in their crown in the kingdom of eternal glory.

They have told me that in the East Christians are persecuted, and many surrender their bodies to the executioners sooner than deny Jesus. Go, then, and bring us some relics of the martyrs, that by honouring their memory and building oratories worthy of them we and others may obtain eternal life through their heroic sufferings."

Boniface took considerable sums to recover the sacred relics, got ready twelve horses and three litters, bought ointments and aromas to honour the holy athletes, and prepared to depart. The grace of God was now working in the steward's heart. The Lord wished to repay him for the mercy he had shown the poor, and the honesty, indulgence, and kindness with which he had treated his mistress's tenants. Before starting he went to bid good-bye to Aglae, and said to her: "Lady, if I find relics of martyrs, I shall bring them to you; but if they bring you my body will you receive it as that of a martyr?" Aglae, believing he said this as a boast, and not from any desire he had of washing out his stains in his own blood, answered: "When will you cease to be a drunkard and an exaggerator? Go, I tell you, and bring me relics of saints. And though I, a sinner, am unworthy of such a favour, yet I hope very soon to venerate those holy remains. May the Lord God of the Universe, who took for our sake the form of a slave, and shed His blood for the human race, send His angel before you, and benignly direct your steps, and, unmindful of my faults, comply with my wishes." Boniface took to the road. Penetrated with compunction, and intimately persuaded of his unworthiness for such a high commission, he resolved to eat no flesh meat nor drink wine on his journey, in order to appease the Divine Justice; and, uniting prayers to his tears and penance, he said, raising his eyes to heaven: "Lord God omnipotent Father of thy only Son, be propitious to thy servant, and direct

my steps, that Thy name may be glorified for ages to come. Amen." This prayer ended, he continued his journey. The Church of the West at that time enjoyed profound peace. The Emperor Maxentius, crowned in Rome in 306, apparently embraced Christianity in order to flatter the Roman people. Simulating more kindness and humanity than his predecessors, he ordered the persecution against the Church to cease. But such was not the case in the East. The persecution begun by Diocletian was continued with renewed activity under Galerius and Maximian. Dai above all, in Cilicia, under the government of Simplicius. Tarsus, the capital of this province, was the place to which Boniface directed his steps. As soon as he arrived and heard that they were subjecting the martyrs to torments, he told his servants to look for an inn and rest their horses, as he was going to witness the sufferings he was told of.

II.

When he arrived at the place he beheld a spectacle which filled the bystanders with horror; the martyrs were undergoing various kinds of torments. One was hung by the feet over flames, another extended on four pieces of wood, which wrenched his bones. The flesh of this one was torn off with iron pincers, the hands of another were being chopped off, some were cruelly flogged, and others punished in different ways; but all, numbering twenty, were being treated with the utmost cruelty. The greater their torments, however, the more did the constancy of these victors over the devil shine forth. At sight of this tragic scene Boniface approached them, and cried out: "Great is the God of the Christians! Great is the God of the holy martyrs! I ask you, servants of Christ, as a favour, to intercede for me with the Lord that I may be a worthy companion

of yours, and fight also with the devil." He then threw himself at the feet of the holy confessors, tenderly kissed their chains, and inspired them with courage, saying: "Fight bravely, athletes and martyrs of the faith; trample on the devil; a little more patience. This short toil will be followed by eternal rest, these brief moments by a joy without end. The body will yield under the torture, but the soul will fly to glory, accompanied by an army of angels."

When Simplicius noticed what Boniface was doing, he asked: "Who is that that mocks me and the gods? Bring him here." When he was brought before him, the Governor said: "Who are you who thus despise the splendour of my justice?" "I am a Christian," answered the steward, "and as such I despise you and your tribunal." "What is your name?" asked the judge. "I have already told you I am a Christian; but if you wish to know my name, I am called Boniface." After a few more questions and vigorous answers, when he refused to sacrifice to the gods, and called them impostors and fomenters of vice, Simplicius ordered him to be hung up and his flesh torn from his bones. During this barbarous treatment Boniface uttered not a complaint, but kept his eyes fixed on his suffering companions, which encouraged him to bear his torments patiently. After an hour the judge again tried his constancy. "Miserable man," said he, "offer sacrifice to the gods, and have compassion on yourself." "Thrice more miserable man," replied the martyr; "are you not ashamed to invite me so often to sacrifice when I told you I do not even wish to hear your idols mentioned?" The governor ordered the executioners to sharpen pieces of cane and push them into the quick of his nails. The saint raised his eyes to heaven, and received that torment with joy, without betraying the slightest sign of weakness. When the inhuman judge

found that Boniface was above all his cruel inventions, and to a certain degree insensible to his torments, he ordered melted lead to be poured into his mouth. Before the execution of this order the martyr wished to implore the divine aid, and looking up to heaven he prayed thus: "I give Thee thanks, my Lord Jesus Christ. Son of the Living God, come to Thy servant's aid, comfort me in these pains, and permit me not to be conquered by this impious governor. Thou knowest that I suffer all these torments for Thy name's sake." His prayer ended, he turned to the other confessors of the faith, and said to them: "I beseech you, servants of Jesus, to pray for me, your servant." The saints all answered with one voice: "May our Lord Jesus Christ send you His angel, and free you from the hands of this unjust judge, and assist you to soon end your career, and inscribe your name among those of His heirs." When this prayer was finished, and he had answered "Amen," a general shout was raised among the people: "Great is the God of the Christians! Great the God of the holy martyrs! Christ, Son of God, save us: we all believe in Thee, and have recourse to Thee. Down with the false gods!" And the crowd rushed at the altar and destroyed it, and threw stones at the judge. Fearing the tumult, he retired, and put off the punishment to another occasion.

Early the following day Simplicius ordered Boniface to be brought before his tribunal, and said to him when he arrived: "Whence, poor wretch, comes this madness of putting your trust in a man condemned as a malefactor?" "Hold your tongue, unhappy man," answered the martyr, "and profane not with your impure lips the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, for if He died on a cross it was to save the human race." Enraged anew at the saint's integrity and constancy, the judge ordered him to be lowered head foremost into a caldron of

boiling pitch. The executioners prepared to comply with this cruel command, and the invincible martyr fearlessly allowed himself to be seized, but first armed himself with the sign of the cross. The angel of the Lord at once descended, and touched the caldron when they were about throwing Boniface into it. At his touch the metal melted like wax, and the pitch flowing about, scalded several of the assistants to death, but left the saint intact. The governor, alarmed at the power of Christ, and wondering at the invincible patience of the martyr, ordered him to be beheaded, in these words: "We condemn to capital punishment this man, who refuses to obey the commands of the emperors." The soldiers immediately conducted the glorious confessor from the tribunal to the place of execution. The holy martyr, making the sign of the cross, asked them for a few moments to pray. This permission being granted, he turned towards the East, and thus addressed the Lord: "Omnipotent Lord, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ! abandon not thy servant; send me Thy holy angel, and receive my soul in peace, that, free from the snares of the deadly dragon, it may join the choir of thy holy martyrs. Rescue, O Lord, Thy people from these impious men; and to Thee be all honour, together with Thy Only-begotten and the holy and vivifying Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen." Then he knelt down, and was immediately beheaded. At the same moment a fearful earthquake occurred, and made all cry out: "Great, omnipotent is the God of the Christians!" In the meantime his servants were seeking him, and, hearing of his execution, purchased his remains at a large price, with which they returned to their mistress, who received them with all honour, and built a church over the place where they were buried. This event happened in the year 307.

In 1603 the sacred relics of St. Boniface were

discovered, together with those of St. Alexis, in the church of the latter, which formerly was called after our glorious steward. Their bones rest in two rich marble urns under the high altar.

As to Aglae, she had already resolved on abandoning the world, and was now confirmed in her good intentions by the miracles which the Lord worked through the intercession of Boniface. She consequently sold all she possessed and gave it to the poor, and she liberated her numerous slaves, retaining only a few young girls, in whose company she dedicated herself to the divine service. Great was the fervour of all, but Aglae advanced so far in her contempt of the world and her love for the cross, that she merited from God the grace of casting out devils, and the gift of curing all kinds of diseases. She thus lived thirteen years in the exercise of all virtues, and then slept the sleep of the just, and was buried in peace near the glorious martyr, Boniface. Such is the generosity with which God corresponds to those who follow His inspirations, be their crimes never so great. He never denies pardon to those who truly repent, nor refuses to convert into vessels of grace and charity those who were vessels of corruption and wrath.



VENERABLE NUNCIO SULPRICIO, BLACK-SMITH'S APPRENTICE.

I.

IN this book young girls will find brilliant examples of other girls, who, in humble positions in life, knew how to emulate the heroic virtues of St. Ines, celebrated by both the Greek and Latin fathers of the Church. Young men will also find suitable ones, though they cannot be

as numerous as are the various professions to which men dedicate themselves. In any case, however, they can look to St. Louis Gonzaga and St. Stanislaus de Kostka, after whose model so many other saints were formed, such as Blessed John Berchmans, raised to the honour of our altars by the immortal Pius IX., to the confusion or consolation of those who imagine that sanctity is impossible without the aid of extraordinary graces. But, if anyone should consider these improper models for artisans, he will find a bright mirror in the edifying, though obscure and laborious life of Nuncio Sulpricio, who, in the toil of a forge, and the pains of acute diseases, bequeathed to every class of workmen an example of solid and Christian virtues. The Sacred Congregation of Rites has already admitted his cause of beatification, and we may hope to soon see him numbered among the saints.

He was born on the 13th of April, 1817, in Pesco Sansonesco, a village in the diocese of La Pena, in the kingdom of Naples. His parents were Dominick Sulpricio and Rose Luciani, who knew how to ennoble their poverty by the exercise of Christian virtues. To them the child might trust his future; but in a few years he was deprived of his father, and after his mother's second marriage had to seek an asylum in the house of his uncle, Joseph Luciani. The latter received him kindly and as soon as he was able to do any work in his forge, placed him under the direction of his son Dominick, a man of a hard disposition, and ill-humoured even to cruelty. His good grandmother took charge of his religious education. To the wishes of both, Nuncio corresponded much better than might have been expected from his tender years. Thenceforth, through the good advice of his grandmother, he became so addicted to intimate dealing with God, that nothing was more pleasing to him than to spend long hours in prayer, or in

other exercises of piety. To the simplicity and candour of a child he united the prudence of a fervent adult. He avoided childish games proper to his age, as also the company of other boys, particularly the bad and ill-reared. As soon as he came out from school, where he was distinguished by his application and good conduct, unless he went to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, in imitation of his patron and model, St. Louis Gonzaga, he returned immediately to his work with edifying diligence. Only once was he found with his fellow-pupils outside the school, and it was when he went to accompany the Viaticum to the house of a sick person, and then by his modesty and reverence he set an example to the rest, into whose minds he tried to infuse his own feelings and the holy fear of God

II.

In recompense for his toil they could give him no more pleasing reward than to permit him to go to hear the hymns of the Church, which he would afterwards repeat at his work. He also took great pleasure in attending at Mass and the sacred ceremonies, at which he was noted for his marked piety and recollected manner. How often, after giving this food to his spirit, as if he were not yet satisfied, would he kneel before some image of the Blessed Virgin, and pour out his heart to his loving and tender Mother! What he received in these and other similar visits no one knows; but what is certain is, that all the time he could spare from his occupations he spent in the church at prayer. And when, from the lateness of the hour or other cause, he found the doors closed, there on the steps he remained praying, with his heart fixed on Jesus, till he satisfied his anxiety. He did everything with great

devotion and much faith, and he was so firm in this virtue, that often, when speaking of its mysteries, he exclaimed that he would sooner die a thousand times than call its least article into doubt. The fruit, and at the same time the incentive of this holy faith, were as well the burning thirst he had to hear sermons and the explanation of the Christian doctrine, as the industrious zeal he had that all should be instructed in the dogmas of our holy religion. He incited all to attend the ceremonies of the Church, to hear the exposition of eternal truths, and he himself often explained, with grace and simplicity, the catechism to other boys. In his ordinary conversation, his greatest delight was to speak, or hear spoken of, the things of heaven. On a certain occasion another boy, having noticed the flame which beamed in his countenance when treating of spiritual things, asked him why he was so affected by such subjects, to which Nuncio answered, with his usual candour and simplicity: "Because so extraordinary is the consolation which fills my soul on hearing news from heaven, ever pleasing to my heart, that I think I am witnessing the delights enjoyed by the blessed in heaven."

And much he needed those consolations to compensate for the hard treatment he received at home. His simple manners, his angelical modesty, his prompt and cheerful obedience, instead of conciliating the veneration of his cousin and his assistants, only afforded them grounds to injure and maltreat him the more. His cousin vented his ill-humour on him with an extreme want of charity and temperance. His anger could not be appeased either by the solicitude with which Nuncio anticipated his wishes, or the docility with which he executed his orders, or the Christian answers with which he tried to disarm him, or the patience with which he bore his complaints; on the contrary, these virtues only exas-

perated him so far as to make him cruelly beat the poor boy. And the assistants, seeing him despised by his own, maltreated him in word and act. Nuncio suffered all this with unalterable patience, without complaint or retort; and if sometimes the weakness of nature made his heart feel sad at being treated so badly, he banished his melancholy by the recollection of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and full of holy consolation, laid all at His feet as the most pleasing offering he could make to Him.

But his pains did not end here. His unnatural cousin, besides giving him work unsuited to his strength, often sent him at night through the neighbourhood to collect his debts, without consideration for the natural fear a boy has in the dark when travelling by lonely roads. And often in payment for his toil, if he did not get as much as was expected, he received a scold, or curses, or worse treatment. All this the Lord permitted to purify the heroic virtues of His servant, and Nuncio ceased not to offer Him the incense of his thanks and praise.

III.

Without displaying discontent or resentment, Nuncio spoke to those who treated him thus, of the eternal goods of heaven, on which he had his mind fixed, and sometimes moved a few of those hardened hearts. The bitterness he suffered only made him raise his understanding and will to God, and he always began his conversation about something relating to the Lord and His glory, or at least ended it with some pious subject useful to souls. Though regarded by some as a fool, he exercised supreme prudence in introducing spiritual subjects without giving offence to anyone. He could have wished to communicate his own fire to all hearts,

and never missed an opportunity of doing so. To have matter with which to feed his own spirit, and supply him with conversation for others, he assiduously read pious books, particularly the "Lives of the Saints." The history of St. Louis Gonzaga, to whom he had a special devotion, he almost knew from memory, and in all his hardships he tried to copy what he had read in it. Like him he felt a holy hunger to eat the Eucharistic Bread; and he approached the holy table with such reverence and fervour, that the light which beamed in his face made him look like a seraph. After receiving his beloved Jesus, he remained a long time in rapture; and occasions there were on which the force of the love with which he was closely united to the Divine Guest caused him to sink to the ground as if wounded. One of his confidants asked him why he remained so long in the church, and he answered: "My dear friend, what can I say? To me there is nothing so sweet, nothing so beautiful, nothing so grand as to pass the festival days in such charming company." Other times he would exclaim coming out of the temple: "I wish to be a saint, a great saint! A saint I have to be, cost what it may."

Another of the virtues in which he tried to walk in the footsteps of the angelical St. Louis, was great penance, accompanied by innocence, which he preserved during his whole life. Never did his acquaintance notice the slightest fault, nor was even an idle word heard from his lips; and, as if the painful toil to which he was subjected, or the ulcers which had formed on his feet, or the bad treatment he received, were nothing, he sought other means of punishing his afflicted body. Even when in hospital, in the rigorous nights of winter, he was accustomed to get up to pray, though trembling with cold. When once surprised in this mortification by one who had reprehended him for the severity with which he treated himself, he began to sob, and said,

with edifying humility: "Pardon my remaining thus some time, for I feel moved to it with such force, that it appears rash in me to resist." What a lesson for those who close their ears to the divine inspirations!

Well did the prophet Jeremias say that it is not in man's hands to choose his way or make straight his path; for without divine grace we cannot take a single step in the road of virtue, and with its aid we can run like giants along it. But who, on this account, will neglect to avail himself of the calls of God and the good suggestions with which the Divine Mercy invites us? They tell us that St. Ignatius frequently said that there is no Christian who could not become a great saint by only corresponding to the ordinary aids of grace. And shall we fail to avail ourselves of them? As a famishing man when presented with a piece of bread keeps it not for another day, but instantly devours it; as a naked man who receives a gift of clothes casts them not into the fire, but puts them on; as a man dangerously ill greedily drinks the medicine on which his health depends; so, and with greater diligence, should we carry out a good resolution and despise not an inspiration, for we are spiritually poor and naked, and infirm. We cannot obtain relief without instantly reducing to practice the good thought which as an alms the Lord sends us. For this reason Nuncio was always so much on his guard to never lose an inspiration, and to avoid the least venial vault, that he was ready to undergo any toil and suffer any penance for nights, and months, and years, if necessary for the purpose. And, indeed, in this he is worthy of imitation; for after mortal sin there is no greater enemy of grace, nor evil more formidable to man, than a venial sin. It is a thing so horrible and displeasing to God, that if we were suffering in purgatory, and we could escape our pains by committing one, we should rather endure to the end of

the world than be guilty of it. And justly, for all things in the world God can choose, not only as a punishment of sin, but as a trial to the just; but the lightest venial sin He cannot choose, but, on the contrary, He abominates it, chastises it with severe punishments, and will never admit into His presence one stained with it, though he had more merits than all the saints together, including His purest Mother.

With holy care, then, Nuncio avoided such defects, and when his conscience warned him of any by the slightest remorse, he ran at once to bewail it at the feet of his confessor. On one occasion, when rising from the tribunal of penance, they observed him rapt for some time, and with his face radiant as a seraph's, heard him exclaim with compunction: "My God! my God!" In vain they tried to bring him to himself. He remained so till the Lord restored his senses, and no one knows what Jesus communicated to him in that vision. It was thus He prepared him for other proofs certainly no less severe than the past.

IV.

The sores on his feet grew worse, and his strength failed so much that he was unable to attend to his work. About this time his grandmother, who had acted the part of a tender mother to Nuncio, died, and his unfeeling cousin, now that he was useless to him, turned him out to beg. The innocent young man bore it all with wonderful resignation; but as he was unable to walk, even with the aid of crutches, Dominick, whether from compassion, or a want of patience to suffer him, procured him entrance into the Hospital of Our Lady del Popolo, through the influence of a charitable gentleman named Felix Bochsinger. The Lord sent him to that refuge of the afflicted to console the inmates with his

maxims and animate them by his example. He was never heard to utter a cry or lament, no matter how dreadfully his pains tormented him. Only when driven to it would he break out in expressions like these:—"O my God! when will you take me to enjoy thy countenance? How lovely, how beautiful heaven is!" All his sufferings appeared as nothing when weighed against the glory they merit for us. At other times, when his pains were excessive, he would exclaim: "Jesus, my life, when shall I enter into glory? When will you open to me the gates of bliss?"

With like sentiments he endeavoured to inspire his companions in misfortune. When allowed to rise, he would take his stick and go from bed to bed, pouring into the hearts of all the balsam of peace and consolation. "Courage, my friends," he would say; "soon shall our trials end. What happiness shall be ours when we gather their fruit in that kingdom of eternal bliss!" One day he was at the foot of another's bed, talking as usual of the glory of heaven: "I entertain the confidence," he said to him, "that I shall go to paradise; and I shall see you also there at my side." With these expressions he wonderfully encouraged the sick to bear their ailments with resignation; and as he united to this zeal an inimitable gentleness and sweetness, few there were who could resist his appeals.

V

This same anxiety for the alleviation of others he had always manifested. If now he deprived himself of his rations to succour others in greater distress, formerly in his cousin's house he robbed his own mouth to generously give to the poor. The charity he had for them was very strong. If anyone asked an alms, and he was unable to give it, he would say with ineffable sweetness:

“Brother, as I cannot help you I will pray to God to move the hearts of those who can;” and kneeling down would say the “Our Father,” “Hail Mary,” and “Glory be to the Father.” He at one time lived in the house of a young man named Anthony. Seeing the latter one day attacked by a burning fever, he was greatly afflicted, and praying the Lord to transfer the sickness to himself, he procured the health of the other at the cost of his own. So far, and farther, did his Christian charity go. But still greater was his zeal for the help and advancement of souls. Persuaded that riches are for worldlings, who have in them the cause of excesses, and for those who have them not a source of temptation, he tried to induce all to despise them, and seek only eternal wealth. “Who will be so foolish,” he frequently said, “as to place his affections on terrestrial goods, which in the end must perish, to the loss of those which shall last as long as God shall be God?” He never allowed anyone to talk of another’s faults in his presence. Those who knew him took good care not to do so when Nuncio was present, for he would either close their mouth with a charitable reproof, or would turn away that he might not hear the detraction. And what shall we say of his angelic purity? In this he was another St. Louis de Gonzaga. In everything relating to this delicate virtue he took the utmost precautions. Even at night, if a thought distracted him, he would rise and commence to read pious books.

Is it any wonder, then, that at sight of his edifying life, and his candid innocence, he was looked on as an angel, and even was called so by many? But the humble youth, who abhorred human praise, when he heard himself so addressed, would say with deep affliction: “Ah! bless God’s mercy, who watches over me, for I am a poor sinner.” With equal humility he always concealed the privations to which he subjected

himself in order to succour the poor, and also the celestial favours he received, fearing lest vain-glory should rob him of his reward. Another patient in the hospital having noticed that Nuncio always covered his face with the sheet asked him why he did so, and the servant of God, as if caught in his innocent artifice, answered: "Let me alone, for the happiness I feel it is impossible to explain." Thus did the good Jesus reward his invincible patience, and blunt the sharp pains which by night and by day gave him no rest. And he on his part did not neglect the means he could dispose of to comfort his soul. He experienced such devotion in attending at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, that he did not omit it one single day when his ailments permitted. In that real and lively representation of the sacrifice of the Cross he learned to suffer in silence, and the fervour and modesty with which he attended it were so great that his face glowed like a live coal, to the no small edification of the bystanders. He also, despite his ailments, would drag himself on foot to the altar of the Blessed Virgin, to pay respect to the holy angels, to offer suffrages for the faithful departed, and go over the acts of the saints, especially of his protector and model, St. Louis. And so, full of divine love, he wished not and knew not how to speak of anything but God. Sometimes, when asked about the state of his health, he would say: "I could not be better, for I am as God wishes: in His infinite mercy I put my trust." When he heard anyone complain he would lovingly say: "If you do not hope in God how can you gather the fruit of His grace? Let us confide in Him; I have the firm hope that He will pardon me."

VI.

But what had God to pardon in that blessed soul, who looked on it as a happiness to suffer for Jesus, and was horrified at the very shadow of sin? Such was the fame of his innocence, such the aroma of his heroic virtues, that persons of learning and virtue came from distant places to be edified by his example and maxims. And in all he tried to excite his own love for Jesus Christ, and all were more than satisfied that fame had not deceived them. But his illness was daily growing, and at last he was unable to even move himself in bed, and appeared more like a skeleton than a living man. He was scarcely able to speak when they prepared him to receive the last sacraments. As soon as it was reported that the Viaticum was going to be administered to him, crowds came, and amongst them many soldiers, to visit him for the last time. The room was full of people, and as soon as the priest entered with the bread of the strong, the sick man recovered his lost strength, sat up in the bed, and without waiting to be encouraged to make acts of faith, hope, and charity, as is usual, burst out into such fervent affections for his dear Jesus that the bystanders, including the soldiers, burst into tears at the moving spectacle. With these good dispositions, after receiving all the aids of the Church for his important journey, he closed his eyes on this world to open those of the spirit in the land of the just, on the 5th of May, 1836.

If the concourse which gathered to witness the administration of the Holy Viaticum was great, greater far was that which accompanied his mortal remains to the grave. They had to keep him four days unburied to satisfy the devotion of the faithful. They wondered to see that body, so pale and thin before, completely transformed in appearance. His eyes shone as if they were

animated, his cheeks appeared like two roses, and a vein having been touched, it gave out fresh blood as if he were alive. The fame of sanctity which he had so justly merited in life, was extended to other countries after his death by the splendour of the miracles which God wrought through his intercession, and which moved the Church to examine into his heroic virtues, in order to raise him some day to the honour of our altars.

Such are the facts of the life of this holy youth, which we have copied from the Acts of the Holy See.

God grant that the record of them in these pages may move many to imitate him !



ST. MARTIN, TAILOR.

I.

WITH the ringing of bells and illuminations the Guild of Tailors of Genoa annually celebrated the memory of their patron, Blessed Martin, the model of all men of their trade. The servant of God was born in the Marches of Ancona, of parents no less exalted in station than fervent in piety, who endeavoured to train him up in the holy fear of God, the source of true and solid nobility. Martin was docile and affectionate, and his heart, like soft wax, received the impression of the maxims he heard so frequently from his parents' lips. His parents, anxious to procure him an honourable means of living, besides preparing him to join the army, apprenticed him to a tailor, in case he should tire of the former. The Christian youth yielded to his parents' wishes, and at the proper age put on his military uniform. In the army he was remarkable for his frankness,

affability, and good manners, as well as for his generous and noble disposition, and he gained the hearts of officers and men. He had one companion, however, whom he treated with great intimacy, and loved as a brother. This companion introduced him to Angelini, Prefect of the Marches, and the three became the most intimate friends in the whole army. The sower of cockle could not bear this friendship among honourable and Christian people, and sought an opportunity of creating disunion among them. It is not to be presumed that they were indifferent to the prejudices of their age with regard to false notions of honour.

Then, as now, if one would not bear injuries with Christian patience, he was regarded as a brave fellow, whilst if he did he was looked on as a coward. One day when they were out walking, our two good comrades began to talk of indifferent things; from talk they went to argument; from argument to blows; from blows to a duel, in which Martin ran his sword through his companion's body and killed him on the spot. To such extremes do our unrestrained passions carry us! The place where it occurred was lonely, and there were no witnesses, so that it was easy for the assassin to hide the body and keep the crime secret for a time at least.

When he turned to go home, and the heat of the dispute was disappearing, then the remorse of conscience commenced. The recollection of the assassination followed him like a ghost. His mind was tortured when he reflected that the prætor would make inquiries, and he should have to answer without knowing what, and that above all he had offended the Lord, whom his parents taught him to fear. As he was passing a church he entered, and throwing himself in tears at the feet of an image of the Blessed Virgin, he besought her to use her power with God on his behalf, and obtain for him the pardon of his crime. The Virgin opened to

him the only door to the pardon he desired, by moving him to confess his sin with humble and penitent heart to the minister of Jesus Christ. Martin immediately called a priest, who, having heard him with kindness and sympathy, told him to put his trust in God, and pronounced over him the sentence of pardon. With the sentence of life peace and calm returned to that agitated heart, and the assassin arose full of consolation, but sorrowful for his crime.

II.

But how could he show himself at the prætor's house, and what answer make to his inquiries? He resolved, however, to continue Angelini's friendship, and when the latter, after a few days, asked Martin what could be the cause of their friend's absence he said: "I also wonder he has neglected our meetings so long, as he used to be most punctual. Something must have happened him." Angelini never suspected the assassin's sincerity. He ordered a search to be made, and offered a large reward to whoever would bring him news of his friend's whereabouts, alive or dead. The body was at last found, and as suspicion began to light on Martin he had to fly to save his life.

On the western shore of the Bay of Genoa, at a place called Peghi, there was a cave in a solitary rock, which seemed marked out as a place for meditation and prayer. There the waves broke sometimes in gentle ripples, sometimes in storm like thunder, reminding one now of the peace of a soul in grace, now of the torments of a soul in sin, whilst its sparkles under the sun's rays suggested the beauty of God, and its extent His immensity. Here our penitent fixed his dwelling: here in

this solitary cave did Martin wish to expiate his sins, anxious to recover the peace he formerly enjoyed by the side of his parents, in the strict fulfilment of the divine precepts. Now the trade he learned when young was of use to him. He sought work in the town to be free from idleness, to meet his wants, and to relieve the poor. Before dawn Martin was accustomed to rise and consecrate his first aspirations to God, offering him all his works in satisfaction for his sins, and spending a long time in meditation. During the day he dedicated himself to work, not without often raising his heart to God and to His beloved Mother, the Blessed Virgin, from whom he had received so many graces. He was extremely temperate, usually eating nothing but a little fish and wild herbs, and fasting often, particularly on Wednesdays and Fridays. Thus did he pass a saintly life, distributed between prayer, penance, and work. He had to daily go a distance for water, to his great annoyance, on account of the distractions it caused him. He lovingly complained of this one day to God, and asked Him to remedy it. And after long supplications a well of crystalline water sprung up in the hard rock on the sea-shore. With what thanks and praises did he repay the Almighty for this favour can only be imagined by a heart as enamoured of God as his own. Sometimes, particularly on the eves of the festivals, he went to the city, as well to provide work and necessaries as to go to confession to the Abbot of St. Benignus', who kept him in the convent, that he might the better sanctify the Sundays and holidays.

III.

Martin was tailor-in-chief to the poor. He not only did their work gratis, but kept them in his hut and

supplied all their wants. Whilst they were resting he mended their clothes with as much care and solicitude as if he were doing it for Jesus Christ. When the devout tailor's generosity was known, his cave became the asylum of the needy. But the poor tailor was not content with this, and, after distributing among them all he had, he zealously taught them the Christian doctrine, and exhorted them to bear with resignation and joy the privations of this valley of tears, and reminded them that "of the poor was the kingdom of heaven." He collected the children who in summer went to bathe near his dwelling, and gave them a high notion of the respect they owed to God and their elders. He explained to them the mysteries of faith, and told them of the sufferings of hell, and the joys of heaven. To encourage them to come to him, he had always some little dainty for them. With what pleasure they told their parents of the stories he related to them, the maxims he had taught them! But the good tailor was still more satisfied with this great work of mercy. His charity extended to all, and he prayed to the Lord that all might be saved. Full of ineffable joy, grateful for the pardon of his sins and the new graces he daily received, he invited the fishes and the birds to bless the Lord; and the birds, which served him as a monitor to sing the praises of God, came to eat from his hands the crumbs he offered them. In prayer, penance, labour, and the frequenting of the Sacraments—in fine, in the service of God—he found that peace of soul which the world cannot give. In the fulfilment of the divine law he struck the vein of true felicity, the reflection of that which the just enjoy in heaven.

The Lord was so pleased with the saint's fervour that, as it were in recompense for the garments he had mended for Him, the food he had given Him the hospitality with which he had treated Him, the

balsam he had poured on the sores of His afflicted body, He not seldom wrought wonders through his means. When at mid-day on Sundays he was leaving the convent of St. Benignus for his solitude, he used to take with him a small vessel of oil, which the good religious gave him as an alms. It happened once that when the cellarman went to fill the vessel by the Abbot Oggerio's order, he found the barrel empty, and was sending away the poor tailor without his usual supply. The latter asked him to look again, for he was in need of it. But the lay-brother protested that it was useless, as he had sounded to the very bottom without finding a drop. But Martin insisted, and the cellarman, by the abbot's order, returned to the barrel, and, to his intense surprise, found it quite full. He ran immediately to announce the miracle attributed by Martin to Divine Providence, who thus rewards the almsgiver. If before he was held in high respect by the good religious, who admired the penitent tailor's fervour and mortification, after this marvel he was venerated by all as a great servant of the Most High.

IV.

At last the good tailor had fully satisfied for his sins, and heaped up the measure of his deserts. He knew that the day of his departure was near, and he made constant preparation for it. When he felt the first attack of the fever which was to carry him to the grave, anxious to have the best assistance he could in that terrible hour of struggle, he went to St. Benignus, whose religious received him with charitable kindness. Stretched on the bed of pain, he did nothing but bless the God of mercies for giving him such consolation; and, having received the Holy Sacraments, he delivered his soul to his Creator in the year 1347, to the great edification of the monks who surrounded his bed.

At the end of his mortal career, an army of angels, in the form of beautiful white butterflies, appeared, and fluttering through the room accompanied to heaven that soul which, by the force of penance, had undergone a transformation more wonderful than that which takes place in the filthy caterpillar when it is converted into a golden butterfly. The funeral rites were performed with great solemnity, attended by a great crowd of religious and lay people, who hastened to venerate the mortal remains of the saint, as they called him. A few days after he was buried a mysterious light began to appear over his grave, exciting the admiration of the faithful. The body was exhumed and found incorrupt, and emitting an exquisite and agreeable aroma. It was placed in a more honourable tomb, the cost of which was defrayed by the guild of tailors, who chose him as their advocate. Thenceforth the Lord made his relics celebrated by numerous miracles wrought by his intercession. I will mention only one.

About the year 1485, Father Gabriel de Gabarin was procurator of the monastery. He extremely loved a convert called Bartholomew, who was very devout to St. Martin. Bartholomew got sick, and, anxious to escape from the dangers of this exile, ardently supplicated his advocate to obtain from God, as soon as possible, his freedom from the prison of this body. Blessed Martin appeared to him, and told him that on Saturday he should go to enjoy the Supreme Good in paradise. The day named was approaching, to the great content of the sick man; but, at the break of day on Saturday, Blessed Martin again came to say that Father Gabriel had obtained from the Lord a prorogation of the promise, and that his exile would be prolonged yet awhile; and after encouraging him to act like a good Christian, and in the meantime heap up treasures of glory, he disappeared. His sudden convalescence proved

the reality of the case. Later on, the convert got sick again, and had another visit from his patron, who brought him the news that on the following Saturday his soul would go to glory. On the day named all the religious gathered around the sick-bed, expecting the fulfilment of the prophecy. And so it occurred. Comforted by the last Sacraments of the Church, to the great consolation and edification of the bystanders, he quietly slept the sleep of the just, never again to awaken till the day of the last account.

Reading from the History of the Holy Family.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

IN one of his evangelical excursions Jesus found Himself on the slope of a mount, besieged by the immense crowd which followed Him. To more conveniently divide among them the Bread of Life, He went up to the top, and immediately the multitude followed Him, covering the hill as the waters at full tide do the sandy shore. Near Him on one side were His disciples: the rest of the ground was occupied by a numerous concourse, like a harvest field of human beings, who swayed like the golden heads of grain tossed by the wind. When Jesus took up a position to speak, the whole multitude became at once calm and profoundly silent, and immediately the Master's voice was heard, uttering words of life, in which, as in compendium, is contained the substance of His celestial doctrine. "Blessed," said He, "are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called

the children of God. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, for my sake; be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." Jesus does not wish us to regard as blessed those whom the world praises and makes much of—the rich, the vain, those who laugh, those who rejoice, the fortunate, the lascivious, the passionate, the oppressors of the innocent, but only those who have a pure heart in the midst of riches, and, complying with their duty, and suffering tribulation with patience, know how to make a conquest, not of a kingdom which passes away, but of the immortal crown of glory.

When He laid down these consoling foundations, He directed Himself particularly to those who should have to inculcate them, and said: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men. You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house. So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Then He addressed Himself again to all in these words: "Do not think that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For amen I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled. He, therefore, who shall break one of these least commandments, and shall so teach men, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But he that shall do and teach, he shall be called

great in the kingdom of heaven." And he deals with those who regard as light what the Church declares to be serious, and who only aim at the appearance of virtue, and says: "For I tell you, unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill. And whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, *Raca*, shall be in danger of the Council. And whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." The judgment and council or Sanhedrim were two Jewish tribunals destined to chastise crimes more or less serious, and the Gehenna or the valley of Hennon, was the place where children offered to Moloch were cast into the flames, and hence it was used as a figure of the fire of hell. Consequently, with these expressions Jesus reprobated the different degrees of anger, condemning not only the homicides and malefactors, but also those who harbour in their breast a spirit of vengeance, which sometimes urges them to break out into gross and injurious expressions. Such was the anxiety He showed to root out all ill-will, even when not manifested exteriorly, that He commanded us all, that if on going to offer a gift at the altar we should remember that our brother or neighbour had anything against us, we should leave our offering there and go and be reconciled to our brother. He also prohibited impure desires, declared the bond of matrimony indissoluble, and condemned perjury and vain swearing. "Let your speech," He says, "be yea, yea; no, no; and that which is over and above these is evil."

"You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy. But I say to

you, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise on the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? do not even the publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? do not also the heathens this? Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."

To these maxims and precepts our Divine Master added others of no less importance. He anathematised hypocrisy and vain-glory. "When thou dost an alms-deed," He says, "sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets that they may be honoured by men . . . But when thou dost alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth, that thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee . . . When thou art praying speak not much, as the heathens . . . for your Father knoweth what is needful for you, before you ask it." Then He taught them the incomparable prayer of the Our Father, saying:—"Thus, therefore shall you pray:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen."

Such was the generosity with which He desired us to pardon those who offended us, that He makes it an indispensable condition for the forgiveness of our own faults. Then He exhorts us not to allow our heart to be attached to the vile treasures of this life, which no matter how numerous and precious they may be, we

shall have to pay as tribute to death. "Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven : where neither rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through and steal." He told them besides, that God alone should be the ruler of our souls, and the only object of our aspirations, for it is totally impossible to serve two masters so opposed as God and the world, God and riches. To love the one is to abhor the other, to please the latter is to despise the former ; and the world is served when the love of any earthly good whatever is not ordained to God.

Looking, then, to the peace and tranquillity of his followers, He distinctly forbade them, not the prudence and toil required to procure the necessaries of life, but that extreme solicitude and excessive unrest which those endure who hope to obtain everything by their own exertions and industry, without counting at all on Divine Providence. Will He who gave us our body and our life, deny us our food and clothing ? "Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you."

"Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns : and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they ? And which of you by taking thought, can add to his stature one cubit ? And for raiment why are you solicitous ? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow : they labour not, neither do they spin, but I say to you, that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. And if the grass of the field, which is to-day, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, God doth so clothe : how much more you, O ye of little faith ?" Such was the confidence He wished us to place in his unlimited goodness, whenever, with his glory in view, we neglected not to contribute our co-operation and correspondence.

Then He went on to condemn rash judgments, saying:—"Judge not, that you may not be judged, for . . . with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye; and seest not the beam that is in thine own eye? . . . Give not that which is holy to dogs: neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet." That is, we are not to expose our august dogmas and sacraments to be profaned by the blasphemies and sacrileges of infidels. "Ask and it shall be given you: seek and you shall find: knock and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened . . . All things, therefore, whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and straight is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are who find it! Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? . . . Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire.

"Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have not we prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity. Every one, therefore, that heareth these my words, and doeth them, shall be likened to a wise man that

built his house upon a rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these my words and doeth them not shall be like a foolish man that built his house upon the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon his house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof.' that

With this beautiful simile Jesus brought His discourse to an end, leaving all astonished at His wisdom and majesty of expression. Happy we if we take these salutary maxims as the inflexible rule of our life.



ST. JOHN OF GOD.

LIGHT FROM THE LOWLY.

Series VI.

ST. JOHN OF GOD, BOOKSELLER.

I.

IN the adventurous life of this glorious saint, shepherd, soldier, labourer, bookseller, and founder of an Order, as he was, booksellers will find many things worthy of imitation. John was born on the 8th of March, 1495, in Montemayor in Portugal, in the archdiocese of Evora. His father, Andrew Ciudad, and his mother, whose name is unknown, though poor, reared him up in all the exercises of piety during the few years he was with them before they lost him. This event occurred thus: A person representing himself as an ecclesiastic happened to get lodging in his father's house, and during conversation spoke so highly of the country about Madrid, that, when leaving, John made up his mind to follow him by stealth to the capital of Spain. He left home, indeed, but his expectation was not fulfilled, for the traveller abandoned him in the village of Oropesa, where some compassionate people took pity on the boy and got him into the service of Francis, the Count de Oropesa's chief shepherd.

In the meantime his mother, tired of seeking him to no purpose, fell sick and died of grief in twenty days after she had lost him. His father, no less afflicted on his account, after the death of his wife, retired to Lisbon, where he ended his days in the habit of St. Francis.

John had, from his tenderest age, a filial devotion to the Queen of Angels, to whom, as to a loving mother, he had recourse in all his necessities and troubles. He daily recited the holy Rosary and other devotions in her honour, and paid her great respect as his special protector. His master, observing that since John entered his service benedictions rained on his house, his fortune improved, his stock increased, and he was sailing before the wind, conceived a great affection for him, and when he arrived at the proper age offered him his daughter in marriage, in order to secure his remaining as one of the family. But John, who desired to consecrate his whole heart to the immaculate Virgin, refused the flattering offer. He was then about twenty-two years of age.

They were just then enlisting men in Oropesa to go to the relief of Fuenterrabia, besieged by the French, and John, carried away by the ardour of youth, resolved to exchange his shepherd's crook for a sword, and join the army of Charles V. There, amid the tumult of arms, and from the bad example of his comrades, though he did not give loose reign to his passions, he gradually grew tepid and gave up his principal practices of piety. But Divine Providence made him again enter on the path of perfection. One day, when forming part of a small detachment sent against the enemy, who had approached the camp, their supplies ran short, and Ciudad, in the heat of his young blood, being anxious to distinguish himself by some adventure, volunteered to go for food to some houses not very distant. For this purpose he mounted a mare which they had just taken from the French. As soon as the animal, after going some miles, knew her ground, she took the bits in her teeth and galloped towards the French camp. The young soldier, fearing to be made prisoner, threw himself off, and falling among rocks, lay for some time unconscious. After recovering his senses he knelt down, and had recourse to her who was always his refuge, and who is never appealed to in vain, beseeching her to shield him and

prevent him from falling prisoner. He had scarcely ended his prayer when a beautiful and celestial shepherdess presented herself, and giving him a drink of water infused into him strength to return to his own camp. John gratefully asked her who she was, and the shepherdess answered: "I am she whom you addressed;" and then she added: "Believe me that in the midst of so many dangers you are ill-protected without the shield of prayer: do not, then, give up your devotions." John was about returning her thanks when she disappeared from his sight. He was disturbed in mind by this singular favour, and, at the same time, continued to dread falling into the enemy's hands; but animated by a mysterious voice telling him to go without fear, he returned to his camp, where he soon recovered. However, he escaped from one difficulty only to fall into another.

The character he bore as a faithful and good Christian induced his captain to confide to him the custody of the booty taken from the enemy. His own honesty imposed on him; for in a few days he was secretly robbed by his companions, and condemned to be hanged as a thief. His protests and prayers were of no avail, till he had recourse to his powerful protector. To the beat of muffled drum, surrounded by some soldiers and attended by a priest, who suggested to him affectionate sentiments of repentance, he marched, with his eyes fixed on a crucifix, he carried in his hands to the place of execution. He was despairing of life when a gentleman, who had lost his way, happened to pass, and succeeded in inducing the captain to commute the sentence of death to some other punishment. He was ignominiously expelled from the camp, and returned to Oropesa, where he was kindly received by his master. Far now from the din of arms, and in places which constantly reminded him of his past fervour, with death ever before his eyes, on whose brink he had found himself, he began again to lead an edifying life. His master, the more he had dealings with him, liked him the more; so that, en-

chanted by his good disposition, his docility, his religious and irreprehensible conduct, he again proposed to him marriage with his daughter; but John a second time refused, resolved on preserving his virginity in honour of the Blessed Virgin. Four years he spent here, and would have remained longer only the Count Fernando Alvarez de Toledo came to collect men from all parts to go to assist Charles V. against the Turks, who were threatening Vienna. John joined him and went to Germany in the count's service. Warned by his former campaign, he acted with more circumspection, and, ignoring human respect, conducted himself like a man who had become a soldier with the high purpose of shedding his blood in defence of the Catholic religion.

When the expedition was over, and the troops disbanded, Ciudad returned to Spain with the count, and landing in Corunna, went to visit the tomb of St. James. After his visit to the patron of Spain he went to Montemayor, his native place, and there he met an uncle of his, who told him his parents had both died soon after losing him.

II.

Finding nothing then in his own country to detain him, he resolved to go to serve God in some other place. Passing by Ayamonte he got lodging in the hospital, where his natural compassion was aroused at sight of the poor patients, and his heart was breaking because he could not relieve them. And when he saw great lords dressed in luxury, with a pompous train of horses, and compared them with the ragged poor, he used to exclaim: "How much better their wealth would be employed in relieving the distressed than on those pampered animals. Ah! if God would only give me the opportunity and the means to serve them as I could desire!" Arriving in Andalusia, he again became a shepherd in the service of Mrs. Levnor de Zuniga. He spent days and

nights in the exercises of piety and penance, constantly imploring the Divine Pastor to have mercy on him. But as this was not the station in which God wished to be served by him, he found no rest. At last he came to the conclusion that he could undertake nothing better to appease the divine justice than to employ himself in the relief of the distressed. To carry out this design he determined on going to Africa, where he could fight against the Moors in defence of our holy faith, and, at the same time, console Christian slaves with whatever he might have at hand, and perhaps receive the crown of martyrdom, which he anxiously desired.

In Gibraltar, whither he went to take shipping, he met a Portuguese gentleman, whom John III. had condemned to exile after confiscating his property. This gentleman, with his wife and four daughters, was about being conducted to Ceuta by the officers of the prince, and he took John with him, as he had offered to serve him gratuitously. In this service he employed special diligence, expecting his reward in heaven. Soon, through grief and the change of air, the mother and daughters fell ill, and all were reduced to the greatest poverty and misery. In their distress the gentleman asked John to go as a labourer on the public works, and the servant of God immediately consented, and for several months supported the family on his wages. But when the works were suspended, that source of consolation was dried up. The heart of the poor Portuguese was almost broken at sight of his delicate family in a strange country, without food or the means of procuring it, his very furniture having been sold to supply his wants. John consoled him like a loving son, and often repeated: "What makes you despair, sir, of the divine mercy? Do you think that if we serve Him as we should, God, who supports the birds of the air, will abandon us? Put your trust in God: there is a remedy for everything but eternal damnation." Then he went out and sold his cloak and ran to relieve the gentleman's distress.

A few days after the public works began again, and again John returned to the exercise of mercy. The ineffable joy which, in spite of his great privations, he felt in these acts of charity was somewhat disturbed by the apostasy of an intimate friend of his. The servant of God attributed this horrible sin to his own fault, and was so saddened by it that he felt no consolation of any sort in his pious exercises. The devil tempted him to follow his companion's steps, though only in appearance, for the purpose of regaining him. John knew his artifices, and went and opened his breast to his confessor, who was a learned and holy Franciscan. Convinced of the great danger which John ran, though aware of the loss he would be to the unhappy Portuguese family, he advised him to return to Spain at once, trusting that God would find another way to relieve the gentleman.

III.

Obedient to the voice of his director, Ciudad embarked for home. A great storm overtook them half-way to Gibraltar, and all believed they were going to perish. John, thinking the Lord had raised the tempest on his account, called out to the crew to throw him into the sea, like another Jonas. He was so earnest in the matter that the sailors, regarding him as some great sinner, took him up and were going to cast him out when he asked them for time to say an "Our Father." The moment he began to pray the waves were calmed. This prodigy changed the erroneous judgment of the sailors, who, during the rest of the voyage, looked on him as a great servant of God. When he arrived in Gibraltar the first thing he did was to go to the church to return thanks to the Omnipotent for saving him from such great dangers, promising to serve Him in all truth henceforth. To prepare himself for this new and more fervent life he made a general confession with great sorrow and copious tears. Here he again went to work,

and from his earnings, the greater part of which he saved, he gave a portion to the poor; and reserved the remainder. When he found himself master of a little capital he determined to give up labouring work and become a peddler in books.

Loaded with devout books and pictures he went through the town and the neighbouring villages to sell them, not so much to make money as to scatter good ideas and draw souls to God by pious reading. Bad or impious books he never carried, and he would willingly exchange good ones for them in order to consign them to the flames. He knew the evils caused by bad books; the more dangerous, the more carefully the poison is concealed in the gilded pill. I must not lose the opportunity of saying something of the injury caused by this infernal poison. If bad companions are to be avoided as the source of misfortune and corruption, much more so should bad books be abhorred; for in them their wicked authors, the plague of society, not only try to cloak their errors and subversive maxims under the guise of virtue, but also employ all their learning and eloquence and adornment of style that the poison may unconsciously flow into the fancy—a diabolical artifice which cannot occur in private conversations. In the second place, words spoken pass away without, perhaps, leaving much impression behind, whilst seductive and impious maxims remain with us in prohibited books, and may corrupt the heart at all hours. For the heart is not always in the same state and disposition, and may admit to-day what on other occasions it would indignantly reject. In the third place, we have not always with us the bad companions, who might pervert us with their wicked discourse and worse example; but at all times and in all places we can find the corrupt book to seduce us. Finally, bad companions are changeable like ourselves, and we may bring them over to our views; but bad books, on the contrary, once printed and published, are incorrigible. Compare these circumstances and you must see

how much worse and more dangerous bad books are than bad companions. On the other hand, if we consider the sad effects they are producing in society, the family, and individuals, our heart must shudder at the danger those run who take in their hands those gilded cups which contain the germ of eternal death. The hair stands on one's head on remembering the suicides and other crimes not less horrid, which daily occur through bad reading. How many children eat the bitter bread of orphanage?—how many wives bewail their widowhood? how many families are steeped in misery from the same cause?—And who are the encouragers of these misfortunes? Accomplices, undoubtedly, at least, are those who barter their souls by exposing such books for sale.

But let us return now to our saint. If among his devout books he carried some profane but innocent ones containing nothing against faith or good morals, but story-books and works of that sort, it was not for the purpose of selling them, but to lower their estimation, and prevent others from selling them. For if anyone fancied one of them he asked a prohibited price for it, and encouraged the buyer to invest in some pious work which he highly praised and offered at a tempting figure, sometimes giving it for nothing. He told them that the reading of the other books was useless, and a loss of the time given us to work out our salvation, left the heart empty, and created an attachment for worldly things of which death must at last deprive us. To those who bought books he made a present of pictures of saints, devotion to whom he recommended as an efficacious means to excite in the heart the love of virtue and the horror of vice. On this account John was always followed by the children, to whom he made little presents, but not without asking and explaining some question of the catechism, exhorting them to wish to go to heaven and to avoid bad company. Thus, under the name of a bookseller, he went about preaching everywhere and pointing out the road to eternal life to the great advancement of souls.

IV.

After spending some years at this business in Gibraltar, and neighbourhood, he took up his pack and went to Granada. The following appears to have been the cause of this journey: On his rounds he one day met a handsome and graceful little boy, poorly clad and bare-footed. The saint took pity on him, and taking off his own sandals he put them on the child; but as they were much too large for his little feet the latter returned them. Then John took him on his shoulders on top of his pack, and pursued his journey. Gradually as he went along the weight was increasing, till he was covered with sweat and scarcely able to give a step. The good man knew not that, like another Christopher, he was carrying him from whose hand depends the machinery of the world. When they reached a fountain the servant of God said to his companion: "I must have a drink and rest a little, for you are so heavy you make me sweat." Then the unknown child said to him: "John of God, Granada will be your cross." The saint at this looked round to where the boy stood, and saw that he had in his hand a pomegranate cut in two, and over it a cross brilliant as the sun. John was going to throw himself at his feet, when the child disappeared. On the moment the zealous book-merchant knew what that symbol signified, and instantly left for Granada (which means a pomegranate), being then about forty-three years of age.

In spite of his frequent alms and presents of books, John's little store was considerably increasing with heaven's blessing. When he reached the city he commenced business on a somewhat larger scale. He purchased a small house near the gate of Elvira, and set up his religious library with the same anxiety as ever, that is, not with a greed of temporal goods, but to gain souls to God. Not small was the fruit he gathered with his industry and polite bearing in drawing many to the divine

service; but God marked him out for greater things. The feast of the glorious martyr, St. Sebastian, was being celebrated in Granada in a hermitage dedicated to his honour, and our good bookseller went to it with his usual devotion. The throng was great, for the panegyric was to be preached by the celebrated John of Avila, a man of great virtue, learning, and eloquence, not without reason called the Apostle of Andalusia. The venerable preacher compared the martyr's arrows to those of divine love; and he spoke so fervently that his words were real arrows, which transpierced John's heart in an extraordinary manner. When the sermon was over the latter rushed out of the church beyond himself, and, agitated by a divine fury, ran through the streets as if mad, tearing his hair and garments and throwing himself in the mud, calling all the time for heaven's mercy. A crowd of children and idle people followed him, and began to shout: "The madman, the madman." Then John ran home, pursued by the boys, who threw at him sticks, and stones, and mud, and the worst things they could lay hands on.

As soon as he entered his shop he destroyed all the profane books, distributed the pictures and devout works, and, collecting all the money he had, went to the prison and liberated twenty-two persons detained for debt. But he did not stop here: badly clad and ragged, he went to the principal church, followed by a crowd of idlers, and began to cry out: "Lord, have mercy! O my God, have mercy on this ungrateful sinner." Some priests, suspecting that this was not real madness, took him to John of Avila to examine him. Soon the zealous apostle recognised the wise madness of the servant of God, and the divine fire which burned in his breast; nor did he condemn the mode he had adopted of seeking humiliation and contempt. The venerable man humoured him, for he heard a voice in his interior which told him to assist John towards the great enterprises for which God had destined him. As soon as he reached the street he

began again to run and shout and publish his sins, exposed to the insults and mockery of the crowd, till two pious men took compassion on him and carried him weak and exhausted to the madhouse, that he might be taken care of.

Here he was treated with great severity as a dangerous lunatic, which pleased John exceedingly, as it satisfied his desires of penance; and if he had any pain it was to see the little care and regard the keepers had for the other patients. In several cases he laid aside his apparent madness, and wisely and prudently warned the attendants of their culpable neglect, and in some instances reported them to the superiors. But they in return redoubled their harsh treatment of him, not for the sake of curing his affliction, but in revenge for what he did, and to make him keep silence. But who can gag a man inflamed by zeal for the glory of God and the good of his fellow-creatures? Hence John continued to point out their negligence, whilst they increased their cruelty to him.

V.

When the venerable Avila was informed of what passed, he sent persons to him to encourage him, and in the end went himself to say it was time to throw off the mask of feigned madness, and dedicate himself to something in the divine service. The saint obeyed; and, being soon regarded as cured, he was liberated on St. Ursula's day, 1539.

As soon as he got out he began to think how he could put in execution his former design of dedicating himself to the relief of the poor; but, first of all, he went to Montilla to make a general confession to Father Avila, and to implore the benediction and patronage of Mary. With this object he undertook a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Guadaloupe in Estremadura, barefooted, bareheaded, with a stick in his hand, and no more provision for the journey than his trust in Divine Providence. When

approaching some village he would gather a bundle of sticks and sell it to supply his wants, dividing the price of it with the poor. He was twenty-two days in the monastery, where he received several favours from the Blessed Virgin, who on one occasion put the Infant Jesus in his arms. On his return to Granada, which, according to the Lord's plan should be his cross, he made his bundles of sticks as before, visited the sick and assisted them as best he could. When passing through Oropesa he begged alms for them, and then went to the hospital to distribute what he got. He treated all with special sweetness, encouraged them to suffer for Jesus, and omitted nothing that could make their lot more tolerable, displaying most charity with those most afflicted. At last he reached Granada, the theatre of his most heroic virtues.

One evening, when in fervent prayer in the church of Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin and St. John the Evangelist appeared to him and placed a crown of thorns on his head, the Queen of Angels saying to him : "My Son wishes to bring you to glory over thorns." When the vision ended he left the church greatly consoled and animated to suffer for Jesus. As he went along he saw a notice on a door which said : "This house to be let for the poor." "This is my crown of thorns," he said to himself ; and, trusting in Divine Providence, he collected some alms and rented it. With what he had collected he furnished it with forty-six beds, which, though poorly found, were a luxury to those who had to sleep on the hard ground. Then he went out on the streets to look for poor people, some of whom he carried on his shoulders to his new hospice. Edifying was the tenderness with which he treated them. When he got them home he washed and lovingly kissed their feet. After accommodating them as best he could, one of his first cares was to induce them to make a good confession, which cures the soul, gives it peace, and in no slight degree contributes to the health of the body. He went out every day to seek alms for them with two large

baskets hung from his neck. With melting and plaintive voice he would say : “ Brethren, give some alms for yourselves ;” and he received so much that he had abundance for his house. The cleanliness and order with which he kept it were extreme. He himself swept the rooms, made the beds, washed the dishes, and attended the sick, having at this time no one to help him. But sometimes the Lord did. One night he wanted water, and taking two pitchers he went to the fountain at some distance from his hospice. On his return he found everything properly regulated—plates washed, house cleaned and everything in order. When he asked the poor : “ Who did it ?” they, in astonishment, said, of course, “ It was himself !” “ No,” said the saint, “ for I was out.” And as they insisted that it was none other than himself, the servant of God said to them : “ The Lord loves you dearly when He sent an angel to serve you, for I can assure you I was out for water.”

VI.

Some companions soon joined them, thus originating the Institute of Charity in 1540, an institute which, later on, extended its branches throughout the universe. The inhabitants of Granada, edified by the saint’s charity, contributed with increasing generosity to its support. The archbishop, an ocular witness of John’s zeal in the relief of the poor, and highly pleased not only at the great good resulting from the order and economy observed in the houses over which he presided, but by his solicitude for the spiritual care of those under him, to which he attended before all, took the holy enterprise under his protection, and helped to give it stability by his large alms. The prelate’s example produced the best effect on the minds of the nobility, who earnestly seconded the charitable plans of the servant of God. One day, when asking help from the Bishop of Tuy, Sebastian Ramirez de Fuenreal, the prelate asked him his name, and the saint answered, John ; and when

asked his surname he replied: "A child who told me to come to Granada called me John of God." "That will be your name in future," said the bishop; and he ordered him to wear a habit of black and white frieze, very like the one adopted later on by his religious. We must observe that John, properly speaking, instituted no new Order, was never a religious, or gave rules to his companions. The Order which bears his name was established six years after his death, in 1556; and, as far as religious vows are concerned, they were not introduced by the saint's disciples till 1570.

The Count of Tarifa once put the disinterestedness of the charitable servant of God to the proof. John went to the inn where the count was staying, to ask an alms, and found him playing cards with other gentlemen. He took a handful of coin from the table and gave it to John. Then he followed him out, and, intercepting him, said to him: "Brother John, I am a poor gentleman, with many claims on me. If you do not assist me, I shall be obliged to do something unworthy of my rank." The saint stopped him short, and at once gave him his purse with all he had collected in it. The following day the count went to the hospice, and said: "Brother, I have heard that they robbed you of your purse last night." "They told you an untruth," replied John, "if they said so, for I willingly gave it to a poor person who asked it." The gentleman, admiring John's singlemindedness, restored him the purse, with another hundred and fifty ducats, and gave orders to his agent that, during his residence in Granada he should daily supply the saint with a hundred and fifty loaves, four sheep, and eight hens for the support of the poor. Analogous things happened in the case of other gentlemen. The love he had for his sick was extraordinary: nor did he hesitate to expose himself on their account to the danger of death. The bells of Granada one day announced a fearful fire. The devouring element had enveloped the royal hospital, and a great

multitude had gathered to save the patients, but nobody dared to penetrate through the flames. The servant of God came running on hearing the news, and without a moment's hesitation fearlessly plunged into the fire, and successively carried out, sometimes two at a time, the feeble sick, who were bitterly bewailing their imminent risk. The Lord was pleased with such heroic sacrifices, and gave him unequivocal proofs of it.

One wet day he saw a poor man huddled in a corner, apparently about to become a victim to cold and hunger. John consoled him, and, notwithstanding that he was laden with his baskets, got him on his shoulders as best he could, to carry him to the hospice. He was jogging along, quite content, when he unexpectedly tripped and stumbled, and the poor man fell to the ground. The saint was greatly distressed on his account. When trying to pick him up again, he saw by his side a handsome young man, who said: "Brother John, God sends me to assist you, for He is much pleased with what you are doing for His children, and has ordered me to write it all down in the Book of Life." "I am a great sinner," answered John, "and everything good is from God. But tell me who you are, brother." "I am," answered the unknown, "the Archangel Raphael, sent to aid you and your sick." Another day the servant of God was short of bread, and the same archangel brought him a large basket of it. Another day he found on the street a poor man in rags, pale, sickly, and half dead. The saint carried him to the hospice, with his usual tenderness. When he went to wash his feet, according to his custom, he found them pierced. Then he looked up, and the face of the sick man shone brilliant as the sun. It was Jesus, disguised as a beggar. No words could explain John's ineffable joy, above all, on hearing from the divine lips these words: "John, whatever you do to the poor, you do to Me." On this the vision disappeared, but such a splendour remained in the room, that the inmates began to cry out: "Fire! fire!"

The saint soon reassured them, by simply and humbly telling them of the miracle.

VII.

But his charity was not confined to his own hospital: he looked upon it as his own misfortune if the necessities of any distressed person in the whole country had remained unrelieved. He, therefore, made strict inquiry into the wants of the poor over the whole province, relieved many in their own houses, employed in a proper manner those that were able to work, and with wonderful sagacity laid himself out every way to comfort and assist all the afflicted members of Christ. He was particularly active and vigilant in settling and providing for young maidens in distress, to prevent the danger to which they are often exposed, of taking bad courses. He also reclaimed many who were already engaged in vice; for which purpose he sought out public sinners, and, holding a crucifix in his hand, with many tears exhorted them to repentance. Though his life seemed to be taken up in continual action, he accompanied it with perpetual prayer and incredible corporal austerities. And his tears of devotion, his frequent raptures, and his eminent spirit of contemplation, gave a lustre to his other virtues. But his sincere humility appeared most admirable in all his actions, even amidst the honours which he received at the Court of Valladolid, whither business called him. The king and princes seemed to vie with each other who should show him the greatest courtesy, or put the largest alms in his hands; whose charitable contributions he employed with great prudence in Valladolid itself, and the adjacent country: Only perfect virtue could stand the test of honours, amidst which he appeared the most humble. Humiliations seemed to be his delight: these he courted and sought, and always underwent them with great alacrity. One day when a woman called him

hypocrite, and loaded him with invectives, he gave her privately a piece of money, and desired her to repeat all she had said in the market-place.

Worn out at last by ten years' hard service in his hospital, he fell sick. The immediate occasion of his distemper seemed to be excess of fatigue in saving wood and other such things for the poor in a great flood, in which, seeing a person in danger of being drowned, he swam in his long clothes to endeavour to rescue him, not without imminent hazard of his own life: but he could not see his Christian brother perish without endeavouring, at all risks, to succour him. He at first concealed his sickness, that he might not be obliged to diminish his labours and extraordinary austerities; but in the meantime he carefully revised the inventories of all things belonging to the hospital, and inspected all the accounts. He also reviewed all the excellent regulations which he had made for its administration, the distribution of time, and the exercises of piety to be observed in it. Upon a complaint that he harboured idle strollers and bad women, the archbishop sent for him, and laid open the charge against him. The man of God threw himself prostrate at his feet, and said: "The Son of God came for sinners, and we are obliged to promote their conversion, to exhort them, and to sigh and pray for them. I am unfaithful to my vocation because I neglect this; and I confess I know no other bad person in my hospital but myself; who, as I am obliged to own with extreme confusion, am a most base sinner, altogether unworthy to eat the bread of the poor." He said this with such humility and candour that the archbishop, in admiration, answered: "Go, Brother John, and do as you like in your house; I give you full liberty."

In the meantime the servant of God's health was daily growing worse. As soon as the bad news was known, the virtuous lady, Anne de Osorio, went to visit him, and seeing him almost in his agony lying on some boards,

with an old coat over him, and a basket for a pillow, she earnestly pressed him to go to her house, where he should be properly looked after. "God forbid," said John, "that I should leave my poor; I have lived among them, and I wish to die among them." Seeing that her efforts were useless, she asked the prelate to command him to do so on his obedience. The archbishop consented, and ordered John to obey her as if he himself were commanding. Before leaving the hospital he appointed Anthony Martin, one of his first companions, superior, recommending to him and the other disciples charity and obedience; then he went to visit the Blessed Sacrament, from which he could scarcely be torn away. He desired also to bid adieu to his beloved poor. "Good-bye, dear brethren," he said; "God knows I wished to die among you; but His blessed will be done." When the sick saw their dear father going, they burst into wailing, grief, and sighs. John was also greatly affected, and swooned away. When he recovered, he said to them: "Peace be with you, my children, and remember me before God."

VIII.

Arrived at the lady's house, she herself prepared, with the help of her maids, and gave him with her own hands, his broths and other things, and often read to him the history of the Passion of our Divine Redeemer. He complained that whilst our Saviour, in His agony, drank gall, they gave him, a miserable sinner, broths. The whole city was in tears; all the nobility visited him; the magistrates came to beg he would give his benediction to their city. He answered that his sins rendered him the scandal and reproach of their country, but recommended to them his brethren, the poor, and his religious that served them. At last, by order of the archbishop, he gave the city his dying benediction. His exhortations to all were most pathetic. His prayer consisted of most humble sentiments of compunction and

inflamed aspirations of divine love. The archbishop said Mass in his chamber, heard his confession, gave him the Viaticum and extreme unction, and promised to pay all his debts, and to provide for all his poor. The saint expired on his knees before the altar, on the 8th of March, 1550, being exactly fifty-five years old. He was buried by the archbishop, at the head of all his clergy, both secular and regular, accompanied by all the court, *noblesse*, and city, with the utmost pomp. He was honoured by many miracles, beatified by Urban VIII., in 1630, and canonised by Alexander VIII., in 1690. His relics were translated with great pomp to the church of his children in 1664. To such a height of glory does the Lord raise those who suffer from the madness of the cross.



ST. GERMANA COUSIN, SHEPHERDESS.

I.

“Learn of me,” said Jesus, “for I am meek and humble of heart.” St. Germana learned perfectly the lesson of the Divine Master, and was so distinguished in His school, that she merited to be glorified by the Lord as a diligent pupil. Not far from Toulouse, in France, are the ruins of a castle surrounded by picturesque scenery, overlooking Pibrac, a little village in the neighbourhood. In this village was born, in 1579, our holy maiden, called the shepherdess of Pibrac. Her father, according to tradition, was a respectable farmer, named Laurence Cousin. The birth of Germana brought joy to his house, but it was soon overclouded, when it was found that one of her arms was paralysed, and her little body covered with scrofulous humours, from which she should suffer during life. This very circumstance excited a more lively tenderness in her mother, Mary Larroche, and made her more solicitous for the well-being of her dear child. The mother’s heart is ever the

more inflamed, the more the fruit of her womb has to suffer, and Germana's attended her from her earliest years with yearning solicitude. In answer to her prayers the Lord, in compensation for the temporal goods of which He deprived her, poured out on the girl's heart abundance of celestial graces, of which she had ample need during life. The poor little thing, at five years of age, lost her mother, and with her all human consolation—her truly Christian mother, who, young as she was, had planted the seeds of virtue in her heart, which Germana afterwards took such care to cultivate.

Her father married again, and his new wife, contrary to Laurence's expectations, turned out a cruel step-mother to the poor sickly child. In the meantime the little thing, favoured with heaven's benedictions, thought over the Christian teaching of her mother, and meditated on the lessons which from time to time she learned in the church from the lips of her pious priest, and, above all, opened her soul to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, who took delight in the immaculate innocence of the poor orphan. Without these graces it is inconceivable how she could at her tender age, have borne with all she had to endure.

Obliged, as Germana was, on one hand, to undertake labour beyond her strength, and, on the other, afflicted by her ordinary ailments, to which since her mother's death nobody paid attention, she began thus early to fly to the protection of God and the Blessed Virgin, accustoming herself to pray and to suffer her pains in silence. It is enough to say that she never saw a sign of affection in her stepmother's face. The very thing which should naturally rouse her compassion for the poor child only made her abhor her. The very sight of Germana, with her dead arm and her running sores, caused her disgust, and she drove her from her with supreme contempt. Not content with this, she scolded and maltreated her, and loaded her with opprobrious expressions. Though the poor orphan was always

docile, attentive, and obedient, though she repaid her hard names with expressions of filial tenderness, she never could get an affectionate word or a compassionate look from her. She could do nothing that was not ill done, and that would not entail on her bitter taunts and worse treatment. Germana did not complain of this; but, finding herself deprived of a mother's love, she had recourse in all her troubles to the Mother of beautiful love, with whose aid she was prepared to endure more sufferings. And God was pleased with the victories of His elect one.

II.

Up to this her father had regarded her, if not with affection, at least with compassion; but, instigated by her cruel stepmother, lest her ailments should be communicated to the children of his second marriage, he sent her to mind a few sheep he had, and obliged her to sleep on some straw in a corner of the sheep-fold. And there the poor thing had to take her rest! But she, fortified by her first Communion, accepted, not only without murmuring, but with pleasure, her new duties and lodging, and endeavoured to do her work the best way she could, as a service done to the Lord.

In a little valley, watered by a stream called the Courbet, to-day is to be seen the trunk of a withered oak, without leaves or branches, covered over with moss and ivy. This tree reminds the inhabitants of Pibrac of the heroic virtues which their ancestors saw the devout shepherdess practise under its then green and wide-spreading arms. Every morning, with her piece of black bread and her reel and wool and whatever else she required to spin, which she did the greater part of the day as ordered, she went out quite content to feed her little flock on the banks of the river. The solitary and pastoral life has many dangers, particularly when idle people engaged in it come together free from all

restraint and vigilance. But the wheel or reel was a powerful arm in Germana's hands to conquer her enemies; and when the thread fell from her fingers through fatigue, she would kneel down to thank God for her victories. In this position she was often seen by the neighbours in the shade of the oak. Nor was her prayer interrupted by following her sheep when inclined to stray, or by the burning rays of the sun in summer or the cold in winter, or much less by her constant work at spinning. Everywhere, and in all her occupations, she knew that God was present, and she treated with Him about the affairs of her soul. It is related of her that whenever she heard the sound of the *Angelus* bell she at once knelt down, no matter where she was, in snow or rain, hail or sunshine. Thus was this tender girl growing in sanctity, preparing herself day by day for the rude contests which the devil might force on her, and temptation never found her unprepared.

In the evening, when the farmers were returning home singing their rude songs of gladness, Germana would also gather her sheep, and recite her prayers on her way home to the sheep-fold. The return from labour is for young people an hour of enjoyment, which in winter they spend around the hearth, and in the moonlight in summer, and in their games and sports they forget the fatigues of the day; but for the poor little orphan shepherdess the nights were times of suffering. When, after settling her flock, she presented herself to her stepmother, she was usually received with new injuries, and even though she were shivering with cold or wet with rain in winter never did she get a corner at the fire, which was completely taken up by her brothers and sisters. Like one suffering from the plague, she was kept far from them, lest they might be infected by her. And whilst the others enjoyed their supper at the common table, she had to sit apart and content herself with a piece of bread, which they gave her to keep her alive. When supper was over she would

retire to her corner under the stairs, exposed to every draught. The devout girl, perfectly resigned to the divine will, suffered all her troubles with invincible patience. And though she could not but feel treatment so unjust, yet she was glad to imitate thus closely the example of Jesus, and give Him proofs of her love in the midst of her dire adversity. For let no one imagine that the servant of God was insensible to her unjust humiliations. Sanctity does not destroy nature, and those who are saints do not, therefore, feel less keenly the thorns with which this miserable exile is strewn. Though the slightest complaint never escaped her lips, yet she often moistened her breast with her tears, and wept herself to sleep on her straw litter. How often in the depth of her bitterness did she exclaim with the Lord: "If it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; but not my will but thine be done!" These natural and in no way reprehensible effects did not prevent her from enjoying true peace in the midst of her afflictions. Severe as were her sufferings, much as they might be opposed to human flesh, they were yet beloved by Germana, for they served to separate her heart from earthly things, and raise her desires to eternal goods, solid and real goods, to which alone the soul, enamoured of its model, Jesus Christ, should aspire.

III.

Thus did the servant of God sanctify the hours of the day, laden though she was with a cross so heavy; and not content with loving God herself, carried away by an ardent zeal for the divine glory, she knew how to engage others in the service of her loving Father, and exercise in the solitude of the fields the industrious charity of an apostle. Almost daily there went to Germana many other shepherdesses and village girls, attracted by our saint's amiability and good example, to hear her talk of the things of God. There under the oak, while engaged

at her work, she sometimes reminded them of the priest's discourse the previous Sunday; sometimes she explained to them the principles of the Christian doctrine; now painted to them the terrible pains of the damned, now described the ineffable glory enjoyed by the saints in heaven, and at other times told them of the unspeakable sufferings endured by Jesus that we might all become good and be saved. What fruit these pious discourses must have produced, joined to the fervent prayers she offered for the conversion of sinners! Often when those girls were grown up would they remember Germana's pious maxims, which would serve them as a shield against the attacks of the enemy. Other visitors, too, had the devout shepherdess in her solitude. Many old beggars went out to see her and share her crust. A poor castaway like Germana, with scarcely enough to eat, and obliged to spend the day at her work, could not satisfy her ardent charity by visiting prisons and hospitals, or attending the sick, or clothing the naked; and yet her industrious zeal found in her lowly condition a means of exercising mercy. The miserable piece of bread given her by her stepmother was divided among the poor, she herself retaining the worst of it, scarcely sufficient to deceive her hungry stomach. And this was not the work of one day only, for every day she subjected herself to the same privation. Her heart felt for the wants of the poor, and, forgetting her own necessity, she attended only to that of others. Who knows but perhaps the Lord, who through her intercession two centuries after miraculously multiplied the bread of some poor nuns in Bourges, did also the same with what passed through her hands in life? We may suppose that after dividing her supplies with the needy she would appease her hunger with wild berries. And if, according to the saying of our Divine Master, the woman who threw the coin into the collection-box of the Temple gained such merit, what must have been the merit of our servant of God who took the food out of her mouth,

having no gold or silver to give, and gave it to God's poor, thereby, too, exposing herself to the revilings of her stepmother? And, besides the earthly bread, she fed their souls by teaching them Christian patience, reminding them of the shortness of their trials and of the eternal joy reserved for those who faithfully follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who became poor for our example and redemption. In fine, Germana did for the poor all she could, according to her age, position, and means, thus placing herself on an equality with those who carry out great enterprises, for the Lord does not look so much to the magnitude of the work done as to the affection and intention with which it is done.

IV.

Whence did Germana derive such heroic virtue and fortitude? We need scarcely say that she had it from the inexhaustible source whence all the saints derived it: she had it from prayer, and, above all, from the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Every eight days she, who, according to tradition, preserved her baptismal innocence, prostrate at the feet of the minister of Jesus Christ, confessed all her slightest imperfections, in order to be more and more purified in the bath of penance; and every Sunday she approached with extreme devotion and modesty the Eucharistic Table to eat the bread of angels, called by the Church the Bread of the strong and the Wine which engenders virgins. She sanctified the festival days in a wonderful manner. The sheep on these days were shut up; for though Laurence treated his daughter heartlessly enough, he had not lost the fear of God so far as to allow the days consecrated to the Lord to be profaned by work. And so the servant of God, having almost nothing to do at home, and looking on herself as in her stepmother's way, took her slice of bread, as on other days, and went to feed her spirit before her sweet Jesus, remaining almost the entire day

in the church. There, before the tabernacle of the Most High, she gave loose rein to her tender devotion, inflaming by pious considerations the fire which burned in her breast. How the divine flame would envelop a heart so well disposed ! Nor did she allow it to die out during the week ; on the contrary, she endeavoured to keep it alive by all the means within her reach. She had a holy envy of the dim lamp, as well because it burned day and night before the Blessed Sacrament, as because it was all consumed in honour of her loving and adorable spouse.

At the foot of the oak there was a cross rudely formed of two sticks. That cross reminded the passer-by that there was hidden the treasure of a soul dead to the world and its vanities. Our saint had erected it as an altar for her holocausts ; and there on her knees she poured out her soul, and offered it in sacrifice to God in simple prayers. It is said that she was often seen there absorbed in profound contemplation. And not only the cross, but everything she saw united her to her Lord. The fragrant flowers in summer, and the dry leaves chased by the wind in winter, invited her to love God, the Author of life and death : the heavens studded with brilliant stars reminded her of the reward which her trials and humiliations should gain for her if borne with a Christian spirit. And well she needed all these helps.

Her good conduct, instead of securing for her appreciation and praise, which she highly deserved, afforded to many an occasion of mockery and contempt. That spirit, ever unvaried and consistent under the hardest trials, that imperturbable peace and tranquillity, the pleasure with which she bore with injuries, appeared to them the effect either of insensibility or refined hypocrisy, to secure for her the useless name of saint. Such the malignity of the world, such the fate of the just ! No day passed that some of her ill-reared companions, male and female, seeing in Germana's conduct a tacit condemnation of their own, did not load her with epi-

thets and insults. When returning from her work they would run after her and call her names. In the village she at last came to be know as *the big saint*. All this and much more did the servant of God suffer, glad to have something to offer to Christ crucified.

To the ardent love she had for Jesus, she united a filial and solid devotion to the Blessed Virgin. One of the practices of piety from which she derived greatest consolation and fruit was the Holy Rosary. She recited it at least once a day on her knees, meditating on the deep mysteries it reminds us of. Besides the affection with which she saluted Mary at the sound of the *Angelus* bell, she celebrated her festivals with special fervour, preparing herself several days before with acts of virtue to obtain the protection of so loving a Mother. How many graces would flow on our saint from the bosom of Mary, who never allows herself to be overcome in generosity by any of her children! This devotion must have served her immensely in the spotless preservation of the pure lily of virginal purity, which she carried with her intact and fragrant to the grave.

V.

From the meadow where Germana was herding she could see the parish church, whose lofty tower daily resounded with the silvery voice of the bell, calling the faithful to Mass. On hearing the signal the devout shepherdess's heart would fly to the temple, and there attend in spirit at the tremendous sacrifice, as her duties did not allow her to be present in person. But this did not satisfy her fervour. One day she felt an ardent desire to attend the Holy Sacrifice, and calling her sheep together, planting her reel in their midst, and making the sign of the cross, she ran to the church to be present at Mass. Her joy was great when on returning she found her sheep quietly resting about the reel and under the shade of the oak. After this she daily repeated the same practice. And though she abandoned them for

this purpose, and the place was infested with wolves, which committed ravages on other flocks, she never lost a sheep or a lamb. Nor rain, nor snow, nor storm could prevent her from following that holy practice.

In going to the church from the meadow she had to cross the Courbet, which in time of rain swelled to such a flood that the most daring would not venture to wade it. One day a torrent came down its channel carrying everything before it. Germana, when she heard the bell, gathered her sheep and planted her reel as usual, and went on her way towards the church. Some neighbours who knew her habits watched with interest what she should do when she came to the flood. They thought *the big saint*, as they called her, would for once be compelled to return to her sheep. But they were greatly mistaken. Germana pursued her way as if nothing happened, and coming to the Courbet's bank, the miracle of the Jordan was renewed, and the waters opening gave her free passage across. They say that this miracle was repeated as often as the stream became swollen. What is certain is that, wondering at the event, the witnesses of it ran and reported it in the village, and many gave up calling her in derision *the big saint* and treated her with the respect her virtues deserved.

But this did not make the saint vain, but rather increased her humility and love of God; and as the divine flame became more intensified in her heart, her charity and mercy to the poor grew proportionately. These two loves, that of God and that of the neighbour, are two parts of one whole, are two links in the same chain, are the two poles on which all Christian perfection turns, are two actions springing from the same virtue, are two manifestations of one sole charity; they are two merits in the eyes of God, but inseparable merits, merits ever in perfect harmony. Thus can we comprehend how in spite of her stepmother's harsh treatment, the saint's conduct was always the same, repaying taunts with praise, disdain with a smile, hatred with love, cruel

injustice with prompt obedience. When her mother saw her revered and beloved by the neighbours on account of the wonderful things told of her, far from entering into herself and valuing the precious jewel hidden in her own house, she conceived greater aversion for the innocent girl, and sought every occasion to afflict and discredit her. She suspected her of pilfering the bread for the poor, and to turn her husband against her accused her of it to him as if it were a matter beyond doubt. The poor orphan was to blame for everything disagreeable that turned up in the house. Poor woman! passion blinded her to the benedictions which the Lord shed on the family on Germana's account. She did not see her crops flourishing and her flocks increasing: only one thing she saw, and that was that many persons entertained respect and veneration for the virtuous Germana.

VI.

On a certain day the servant of God was going to divide her piece of bread with the poor, who were awaiting her on the road, when she suddenly heard the shouts and imprecations of her stepmother. Believing she had caught the pious shepherdess in the very theft, she ran like a fury after her with a stick. Some neighbours who were going to Laurence's house, seeing her in a passion, and suspecting what she was going to do, followed her through curiosity and for the purpose of protecting the innocent victim. They arrived in time; but their presence did not restrain the angry woman from loading the poor girl with insults, while with her stick raised she commanded her to give up what she had in her apron. Germana at once obeyed, and, oh! prodigy of the Lord! the bread had disappeared, and in its place were fresh and beautiful flowers, flowers unknown in the country, then buried in the depth of winter. The witnesses of this scene, when they recovered from their astonishment, ran to spread the news through the village; and the stepmother returned sad and crestfallen

to her house. When the report reached Laurence's ears, it determined him to take steps to free his daughter from the cruelties of his wife. He consequently ordered her to let Germana alone and give her no annoyance; and asking the girl's pardon for his previous neglect, he told her she should henceforth occupy her proper position in the house, and sleep no longer in her corner, but in a decent bed like his other children. The poor thing was alarmed at this, for she had no other pleasure than to suffer for Jesus, and for His sake lead a life strewn with trials and privations. She consequently did not agree to all her father proposed, but by prayers and entreaties obtained from him permission to follow without obstacle the inspirations of her mortification and piety. Therefore Germana pursued her usual method of life: she lived on bread and water, slept under the stairs on her bed of straw, and tended her sheep in solitude and retirement. If she availed herself in anything of the influence her virtues had gained her in the neighbourhood, it was to prevent offences to God, and to attach the inhabitants to the service of the Lord. Only one thing did that blessed soul miss—the insults which had helped her so much to know and despise this vain and corrupt world. She felt this loss very much, but the Lord supplied it in other ways, which she willingly accepted; and, on the other hand, she rejoiced that her new position afforded her increased means to succour the poor, and greater authority and veneration to make them listen submissively to her Christian instructions.

VII.

In the spring of 1601, a priest of Gascony was going to Toulouse. It was night when he reached Pibrac, and he could scarcely make out his way in the darkness. On a sudden a certain brightness dissipated the obscurity, and he saw a splendid procession of sacred virgins come down from heaven and go to a corner of the village. At the same time two religious caught by the

darkness, and ignorant of the road they should take, sought shelter in the ruins of the castle of the ancient lords of Pibrac. In the middle of the night they also saw two virgins, surrounded by brilliant light, pass in the same direction as the others. Neither the latter nor the former knew the meaning of it.

At break of day, Laurence observing, by the melancholy bleating of the sheep, that Germana had not come out as usual, anxiously sent one of her little brothers to call her. The child did call more than once, but Germana did not answer. He then went into the room and found her dead on her straw bed, modestly laid out and her face like that of an angel. She died as she had lived, deprived of all human consolation, but attended by that troop of virgins who had come to be present at her departure. And the good priest as well as the two religious hastened to Pibrac in the morning to inquire who had died during the night, for they had seen a virgin leave it crowned with a brilliant diadem, and accompanied by numerous angels, more refulgent than the stars. The inhabitants were not aware of what had happened in Laurence's house, but from the description they at once concluded that the holy shepherdess, as they called her, had expired. They ran to inquire, and found Germana lifeless, but inspiring with her angelic countenance, not fear and dread, as usually happens in such cases, but piety and devotion in the hearts of all. This beautiful flower was scarcely twenty-two years of age when she was transplanted to the garden of glory. When the news spread in the neighbourhood innumerable crowds flocked to her funeral. She was buried in the church in front of the pulpit, with a candle in her hand and a garland of rye-stalks and flowers on her head.

VIII.

Forty-three years after, a female relative of hers ordered in her will that she should be buried beside Germana. When digging the grave they found the saint's

body incorrupt, beautiful, and flexible, with blood flowing from a slight wound made by the pickaxe. The whole village collected at the news of this miraculous preservation, and the old men who had known her in their youth recognised the body as that of Laurence's daughter. To satisfy the public curiosity they had to remove the sacred relics, and place them in a decent coffin before the pulpit, in sight of all the people. But as the lords of Pibrac had a seat there, in order not to have before their eyes a reminder of death in that venerable body, they ordered it to be transferred to some other place. Dearly did their want of courtesy and their irreverence to the servant of God cost them. Very soon after, Mary, the wife of Francis Bauregard, the owner of the village, was afflicted with a horrible ulcer on her breast, and her only son, whom she was nursing, was on the point of death, poisoned by the corrupt milk. They called in the most skilful and experienced doctors; but the illness of the mother and child, far from yielding to the costly remedies, was growing momentarily worse. The husband suspecting that perhaps it was a punishment from heaven for what they had done to the mortal remains of Germana, communicated his well-grounded fears to his wife, and they both recommended themselves to the charitable shepherdess, promising to repair their fault if she restored their health to the family. The following night a bright light surrounding Germana awakened the sick woman. The servant of God spoke to her with sweetness and amiability, promised her the favour she had asked, and then disappeared. Then she called the rest of the family, and told them what had occurred. She at once looked at her sore and found it cured: she made them bring the child, who had been three days without sucking, and it immediately took the breast, as if it had never been unwell. On the report of this prodigy many hastened to implore the protection of the blessed girl, whose body was enclosed in a leaden urn at the expense of the

owners of Pibrac. The new miracles wrought in favour of those who had recourse to her sepulchre contributed to foment the devotion of the people, which the impious revolutionists of last century were unable to extinguish.

At the customary cry of "Hurrah for liberty and fraternity!" the throne of France was upset by a mob of wicked men, who subjected the people to the most fearful slavery in trying to root out religion from the hearts of the faithful. Not content with barbarously assassinating the ministers of the Most High, and trampling down or murdering all who professed themselves Christians, they profaned the sacred vessels, destroyed the altars, scattered to the wind the ashes of the saints, and committed in all parts unheard-of profanations and sacrileges. Such is the liberty defended by those emissaries of hell, who forge their plans in darkness, to bury the entire world in fearful barbarity. Their turn came to the relics of our saint. They removed her body from the view of the devout, and buried it in quicklime to dissolve it, if they could. Just chastisement of God! Of those engaged in this sacrilegious attempt one was suddenly attacked with paralysis; another's neck was turned till his face looked backwards; and a third, in the flower of youth, was afflicted with an obstinate disease, so that he could scarcely walk a step without the aid of crutches. This last carried with him to the grave the punishment of his wicked act; but the two former, repenting of their sin, obtained their complete re-establishment through the intercession of the saint.

In spite of the opposition and the rage of the revolutionists the faithful continued to venerate the servant of God in her glorious sepulchre, till the times mended, and they had the consolation of seeing her disinterred anew, the body being found as fresh as ever, notwithstanding the means adopted by the sacrilegious libertines. The Lord never ceased to glorify His humble servant; and she who in life received only contempt and ill-treatment, after death was honoured by kings and their

subjects, young and old, learned and ignorant. In view of the numerous and great portents wrought through her intercession, she was raised to the honour of our altars by the immortal Pius IX. in May, 1853; and on the 29th of June, 1867, on the solemn feast of the eighteenth centenary of the death of the prince of the apostles, St. Peter, she was inscribed by him in the catalogue of saints, the 15th of June being appointed as her feast. Here we have a life easily imitated by all Christians: to keep the holy Commandments, to frequent the sacraments on Sundays and holidays, to attend daily in spirit or in reality at the holy sacrifice of the Mass as far as duty might permit, to profess a filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin, daily reciting the holy Rosary in her honour, to obey her superiors promptly and gladly, to suffer sickness with resignation and patience, to put up with slights and injuries, to avoid the danger of staining her soul with sin, to do all the good she could—this was Germana's rule of life by which she sanctified her soul. Let us do the same, and we shall be holy and perfect in the sight of God.



VENERABLE ANNA MARIA TAIGI, HOUSE-
MAID AND SEAMSTRESS.

I.

“HE who to show His power and wisdom usually chooses the weak and despised of the world to beat down the glory of the age, to mock the plans of the impious and break the power of hell; He in our times in which human pride and the forces of the abyss seem to conspire to destroy, if possible, not only the foundations of the Church, but the bases of civil society, opposed a woman to the storm of impiety which rages on all sides.”—This woman was Anna Maria. Such is the encomium with which Pius IX. commences the decree to proceed to the

beatification of the venerable servant of the Lord, whose life we are going to trace.

In the year 1775, a poor family, oppressed by misfortune and misery, left Sienna for Rome. A tender little girl of six years painfully followed the steps of her father and mother, and they had to carry her by turns, as well to rest her as to hasten their journey. The child was called Anna Maria Gianetti, born at Sienna on the 29th of May. Her father Louis, and her mother Maria Masi, having come down in the world, were obliged to give up the apothecary's shop by which they had hitherto lived, and leave their country in search of another in which they might do better. Rome appeared suitable to hide their poverty, and thither they directed their steps. When they reached the end of their journey, without means or friends, they had to hire as servants to gain their livelihood.

Anna Maria lived with her parents in a little house they had taken; and whilst they were engaged at their service they gave charge of the child to some good nuns dedicated to the care and education of poor children. Through their careful training the innocent girl formed the delight and enchantment of her unfortunate parents. Active, sharp, and intelligent, she quickly learned the lessons which she received in that school of virtue. Nor did her parents neglect to co-operate with the care of the good religious during the time they had at their disposal. Christian hope had been their consolation and shield in the tribulations with which the Lord usually proves His elect; and they anxiously wished that their daughter, who would have no fortune, should inherit the most precious of all earthly gifts—conformity to the Divine Will. For this purpose they frequently taught her the catechism, took her to Mass early in the morning, and trained her in the exercises of piety becoming a good Christian.

When she made her first Communion, under the prudent direction of the nuns, her parents thought of taking her from school, and putting her to work, to

relieve their necessities. At thirteen years of age they placed her in a silk factory to reel and make skeins, and in this humble employment she passed some years. But this work did not satisfy her activity, nor the aspirations which now begun to awaken in her heart. She consequently told her parents that she would like to enter some house as servant. Louis, anxious to have his daughter near him, asked his mistress, who was a rich lady, named Mary, to take her as housemaid. The lady consented. But what can all the precautions and anxiety of parents do when children place themselves on the brink of the precipice? Many errors they can undoubtedly prevent; but not seldom have they to lament disagreeable things, the fruit of youthful rashness. Anna Maria let vanity enter her heart. From the unfortunate anxiety to please, to see and be seen, she began to dress, perhaps above her means, and to show off her adornments and beauty in public: and this foolish pleasure nearly made shipwreck of her. Of course as servant she could not be tied to the house at her father's side, as would have suited her; and so in one of her excursions the enemy laid his snares for her. Her eyes met other eyes which disturbed her heart, the look was followed by tender expressions, and the tender expressions by an offer. Grace never deserts us in moments of trial: if we fall it is our own fault. Anna Maria listened to the voice of God, speaking in her conscience, and the hour of struggle was for her the hour of victory. In that contest she realised that modesty should be the veil of Christian maidens, and the impenetrable shield of their innocence. How many, forgetful of this adornment, become the victims of their own imprudence!

II.

This danger somewhat opened the eyes of our incautious housemaid and left her steeped in salutary unrest. At this very time a good Milanese named Domi-

nick Taigi, a friend of Louis', was looking for a wife, young, industrious, healthy, and amiable, who might make the happiness of his house. Gianneti's daughter appeared to him to have all the qualities he wanted; and so, having obtained her parents' consent, he asked the hand of the girl. Our housemaid recommended the matter to God, for though a little vain, she knew the step was of supreme importance. After consulting the Lord and her parents, she believed her new state would be a safe anchor in the tempests of this boisterous world, and she consented to the match, and was married in Epiphany week at twenty years of age. Unfortunately her new position, far from smothering in her heart the love of adornment and amusement, appeared only to increase it. Her husband, too, in showing her off in public, fomented those habits so dangerous at her time of life.

Steeped in her vanities, little did she trouble herself about her eternal salvation. Content with the minimum fulfilment of the Church's commands she thought she satisfied her obligations to God, and could without scruple waste her time in frivolous diversions. Vanity and extravagance are not seldom the ruin of rich families, but to a poor one, which forgets to lay by something for a rainy day, it is enough to be one week without work, or to be visited with sickness, to find itself reduced to poverty. Cleanliness and tidiness are the only luxury which sensible artisans should aim at. These maxims of salvation and life had little or no effect on Taigi's young wife. If God, the loving Father of the poor, occasionally sent her remorse to withdraw her from the abyss of perdition, it usually found her deaf to its call. It is hard to kick against the goad; and so weariness and want of enjoyment grew in Anna Maria in proportion to her resistance to grace, which called her to a perfect life.

One day, Mrs. Taigi, dressed in her best, was crossing the square of St. Peter, to attend a ceremony which was to be celebrated in the church of the Vatican. At the

same time a Servite religious chanced to meet her, and a mysterious voice in his interior said to him: "Observe that woman well. I will place her in your hands, that you may labour for the conversion and sanctification of her soul, for I have chosen her." They each pursued their different roads; and Anna Maria continued struggling against grace, and the good Servite working zealously in the conversion of sinners.

But the more she resisted the divine attentions, the more she tried to drown the voice of her unquiet conscience and to sleep on the roses of pleasure, so much the more did she feel agitated by remorse and buried in deep sadness and bitterness. Grace, on the whole, was daily gaining ground: her sense of distaste and vacuity, was to her a dim light which obscurely showed her the felicity of the just in this valley of tears. Blessed are the poor, for they more readily enter on the path of life! Their very indigence deprives them of those sad means of counteracting the weariness arising from pleasure by plunging into new and varied delights, of suffocating remorse by numerous stratagems, of closing the door on divine grace by all the enchantments of a corrupt world, till sickened of all human inventions, they grow tired of themselves, and life becomes an insupportable burden. Anna Maria was in the happy condition of the poor, without any resources to fill the vacuum of her heart, and at last she hearkened to the voice of God, and resolved on a change of life.

III.

Just judgments of God! Prostrate at the feet of a confessor, she said: "Father, you have before you a poor sinner;" but instead of meeting with a good Samaritan to anoint the wounds of her heart with the balsam of life, she met with one of those Jansenists of the last century, who with their errors and caprices made the road to heaven almost impassable to poor sinners, and with a few words he sent her away disconsolate, without

giving her the pardon of her sins. Sad, confused, agitated like a frail bark tossed by contrary winds in the midst of a furious tempest, she knew not what course to pursue. Great and serious obstacles are cowardice and pusillanimity in the path of good, for to reach the pinnacle of perfection a decided will aided by grace is necessary and sufficient. Our poor lamb was disheartened, and surrendered herself to the mercy of the waves which raged round her heart. But the dissipations, pleasures and diversions of the world, instead of affording her the consolation she sought, only appeared to cry out to her, "Why do you run from the fountain of life? in us you will not find peace;" and her bitterness and desolation increased. Submissive to the voice of her conscience, she made another effort, and, determined on seeking a new confessor, she went to the church of the Servites.

Fearing she might meet with another wolf dressed as a shepherd, and fluctuating between life and death, she entered the temple and looked from one side to another, not knowing to whom to go to discharge the load of her conscience. Her eye at last falling on a confessional surrounded by numerous penitents, thither she went with the firm resolution of relieving her afflicted soul. As soon as the confessor saw her at his feet he recognised in her the woman whom he had seen in the square of St. Peter, and speaking in a paternal tone, said to her: "So you have come at last!" He was Father Angelo, who treated her with charity and mercy; and convinced that the Lord had great designs with regard to his penitent, he did his best to put her on the path of perfection. When she got up from the feet of the good pastor, Anna Maria wept with joy, and would not have exchanged a moment of the sweet peace which abounded in her heart for all the pleasures of earth put together. Her change was radical and irrevocable. Penance, poverty, assiduous labour, works of charity, patience, the care of her home, prayer and recollection took the place of the delicacy, ambition, idleness, dissi-

pation, and neglect in which she had previously lived. As soon as she gave herself without reserve to the divine service, she went to such extremes in the rigours of her penance that her confessor had to moderate her excesses. She condemned herself to eat only what was absolutely necessary to preserve her life. Her ordinary food was a cup of coffee and a slice of bread on her return from Mass, a few spoonfuls of soup and a small bit of meat at noon, and for supper a few mouthfuls of salad. She usually took her dinner and supper standing, in order to attend the rest of the family and hide her abstinence. Besides the fasts prescribed by the Church, she fasted on Wednesdays, in honour of St. Joseph, on Fridays in honour of the Passion of our Lord, and on Saturdays in honour of the Blessed Virgin. Her mortification, however, was greater with respect to the quality than the quantity of her food; for she always selected the worst, and when her husband brought her some sweets, of which she was very fond before her conversion, she never tasted them. As to drink, she never took anything but pure water, and that only at meals, for outside these hours she never drank, no matter how burning her thirst might be.

Her mortification in this respect did not end here, for sometimes in spite of the great heat of summer and the thirst produced by her abstinences, she passed entire days and nights without tasting water. There were times when she could willingly cast herself headlong into a fountain to extinguish her burning thirst; but on these occasions she either entirely deprived herself of drink or tasted merely a few drops which only increased her suffering. Thus did she literally comply with what she frequently used to repeat: "He who loves God should mortify himself in every way, and in all things, and the more the beastly body kicks against it, the more tightly should he pull the reins." She not only denied all consolation and indulgence to her senses, but endeavoured to incessantly mortify them, and this besides taking into

account her disciplines, crown of thorns, and other things with which she chastised her body in punishment of her sins. What a shame for us, who are so delicate and yet require so much to apply the pruning hook to the vicious excrescences which abound in us! In the beginning of her conversion she conceived such a horror of sin, that when she thought of the offences which she had offered to God, the most loving of Fathers, she would beat herself till she mingled blood with her tears of repentance.

IV.

Interior mortification usually accompanies the exterior' and in Anna Maria the former was much greater than the latter. She was resolved to give nature no satisfaction, not only in things forbidden, but in the lawful, and she carried out her resolution. Her favourite maxim was that to acquire the love of God we must row against the flood and oppose our own will. With this rule of conduct she had gained such control over herself that always acting from supernatural motives, she conformed on all occasions to the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Entirely dead to herself, she not only suffered taunts and injuries without complaint, but treated with special sweetness and affection the persons whose offences excited her strongest antipathy. There were not wanting terrible contests of the passions which rebelled against reason, but she knew how to subdue them without letting the world know the agony she interiorly suffered, and after repeated victories, gained at great cost, she enjoyed the fruits of that peace which is beyond conception. Anxious to close the door on the passion which had led her astray, and from devotion to the Blessed Trinity, she put on the habit of the Third Order of Trinitarians, and with her confessor's and her husband's permission she wore it ever after.

This perseverance in the right path, once entered on, is not attained without assiduity in prayer. Maria knew this perfectly well; and convinced of her own instability,

weakness, and nothingness, she endeavoured to reduce to practice our Saviour's advice about watching and praying, and praying always. She fitted up a little oratory in her house, dedicated to the Mother of Mercy, before whose image she kept a lamp burning night and day, and this was her place of retirement and recollection in her leisure hours. In summer, when the rest of the family were sleeping the *siesta*, she retired to pray. During the night she sat up praying till two or three o'clock in the morning, at which hour her husband used to come home from the Chigi-palace, where he was a servant; but to hide her devotions, and avoid annoying him by her sittings up, she would go to bed when she heard him approach. And yet her heart was not satisfied with these long spells of prayer. She got up very early in the morning to go to the church to pray, so that, according to the testimony of a daughter of hers, her hunger for prayer scarcely allowed her to sleep three hours. Prayer was her daily bread. As a child runs to its mother when it meets with any trouble, so the servant of God, in her temptations, in her trials, in all her necessities, hastened to Him by means of prayer with all the effusion of her soul. Full of unflinching faith, of firm hope, of ardent charity, she kept this sacred fire alive with ejaculations, which like penetrating arrows flew to the core of the Divine Heart. She frequently repeated: "Jesus, my hope, have mercy on me! Mary, the mother of hope, pray to Jesus for me! Jesus, Father of the poor, have pity on me!"

If she prayed and laboured hard for her own sanctification, she was not less anxious to promote that of the whole family. The Lord had blessed her marriage with four sons and three daughters, two of whom were transplanted to heaven like tender flowers in the spring of life. The care she took of them was extraordinary. They could scarcely lisp when she taught them to bless Jesus and Mary; and after teaching them to read and write, along with the catechism, she sent them to the

public schools which Christian charity supports in Rome. She never let them go alone, and as far as possible she went with them herself. Determined on preserving their innocent souls stainless, she not only kept them away from seeing or hearing anything that might affect in the slightest degree their purity and candour, but also took pains to accustom them to the practices of piety. Thanks to her vigilance and care, her sons, when they came to the proper age, went to communion once or twice a month and her daughters once a week. When they committed a fault, and would not be corrected by gentle means, she also knew how to apply rigorous chastisement and make their tears flow. "He who spares the rod hates the child," says the Holy Ghost; and this rule the servant of God acted on when she judged it requisite. With the object of inspiring them with modesty and mutual respect, she made each one sleep in his or her own little cot, which she surrounded with cheap but clean curtains. When her daughter, Sophy, was old enough to get married, she allowed her to speak to the young man for two months, that she might learn his disposition, but never alone. What a lesson for many incautious mothers! God grant it may not pass unnoticed or not understood.

V.

And in spite of such prudence, and care, and precaution, she could not make them all respond to her wishes; but her conscience told her she had done her duty, and she left the rest to Providence. Besides inculcating the fear of God, conscious of her own insufficiency, she constantly prayed for them to the Lord of mercy. When relieving her burdened heart one day before her loving Jesus, she was consoled with these sweet words: "Be not cast down, for I will save them because they are your children, and because they are poor, and the poor are my beloved; yes, I will save them though they have defects." She had also at home another field in which to display her zeal and charity.

A husband's crossness, the peevishness of old parents, the arrogance and haughtiness of daughters-in-law, are a dull file which wears out the patience of virtuous souls. Anna Maria had all these trials at once; and yet in the most difficult circumstances, in the most unexpected opposition, her lips distilled nothing but sweetness and honey. Embracing the cross, recognising the paternal hand of Providence in everything, she met difficulties and bore with bad temper in silence, she responded to injuries with amiability, she humoured everybody's whims, and made herself all to all to bring them to Jesus Christ. When her husband came home out of temper, and began to scold without reason, she closed her lips, listened to him with patience, and when he was calmed down, if she thought it right, respectfully showed him he was wrong, and completely disarmed him. As to her aged parents, she tried with all her might to sweeten their old age and poverty for them, consoling them in their afflictions, aiding them in their necessities, giving them things she knew they liked, and leaving nothing undone to content them, and repay them for the toil and hardships they had endured for her. She attended them in their last sickness like a loving daughter, closed their eyes at their death, and had several Masses said for the repose of their souls. When she suspected there was going to be any row in the family, above all between her mother and the wife of her son Camillus, she, like an angel of peace, prudently stopped it at once, without offence to either. She showed like sweetness and charity to the young dressmakers, who worked under her direction.

Her house was like a convent—all was order and harmony, everything was done in its proper time, religious exercises occupying the first place. In the morning when she returned very early from the church, she awoke all with the sweet names of Jesus and Mary. Then they went together to the domestic oratory to thank God for favours received, offer to Him the works of the

day, and ask His blessing; and afterwards, unless something important prevented them, they went in turn to hear Mass. In the evening she went with her daughters to visit Jesus in the Forty Hours, and then after paying a passing visit to some of the sanctuaries of Rome, she quietly went home. At night they all gathered around their holy mother and read some pious book, usually the Lives of the Saints, and then resting from the fatigues of the day, they indulged in innocent conversation. When the hour for the Rosary came, they said it with devotion, finishing up with the invocation of the holy protectors of the house and night prayer. At the end of this pious practice they retired to bed; and when they were all settled in it their loving mother went to say something kind to them, to recommend them to their angel guardians and give them her maternal blessing. What a blessed sight in the eyes of heaven to see a family governed with such zeal and sweetness!

On festival days they added to these practices of piety strict rest from all servile work not absolutely necessary, and attendance at the functions of the parish church. She also allowed them some recreation, and for this purpose would take them to visit some sanctuary at a little distance from the city, and give them a lunch on chestnuts and wine. One of these trips fell on a Friday, and the servant of God accompanied her family as usual, but got a reprimand from her Divine Spouse on account of that day being consecrated to the memory of the Passion; and ever after they abstained from this recreation on Fridays. What felicity, what joys can be compared to the peace, the consolation of a family educated in so Christian a manner, so united, so orderly, so satisfied with their poverty? Anna Maria would not have exchanged for all the pleasures the world affords one sole moment of this happiness, which cannot be purchased with all the riches of earth, and is only to be procured by prayer, abnegation, and a good life. In everything virtuous this magnanimous woman led the van of her

house: she was the soul which gave movement and life to all the members of that poor but happy family. She was never a laggard on the path of perfection.

VI.

What an illustrious model of all virtues they had in her! Her devotion to the Blessed Trinity, to the Saviour of the world, to the Virgin Mary, to St. Joseph and her protecting saints was most tender. In the holy sacrifice of the Mass she offered to the Eternal Father in union with the priest, the blood of His Divine Son for the conversion of sinners and the propagation of the Catholic faith. She asked the Incarnate Word by the Virgin's milk which He had sucked, and by the torments which He had suffered on the cross, to dissipate the darkness of heresy and infidelity; she besought the consoling Spirit to renew the face of the earth and burn all souls in the flame of divine love. The mysteries of the infancy of Jesus as well as of His passion were to her divine lessons, which formed the object of her ordinary meditations, and from which she drew abundance of prudence and wisdom. With the view of engraving them on her heart she prepared for the birth of Jesus Christ with a fervent novena, and at all times endeavoured to regulate her conduct by the teachings of the cross. One of the practices from which she derived greatest advantage, and which she recommended most to her children, was the exercise of the *Via Crucis*, which she was accustomed to make in the Colosseum; and when she could not take part with the other members of the confraternity there established, she did it in her own house or in some neighbouring church. The image of Jesus crucified was her beloved book. Rarely did she peruse it without feeling burned in divine love, and shedding abundant tears of compunction and sorrow. The fruit of these meditations was her love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and His deified Heart;

and in reward of her faithful correspondence she tasted the sweets of Mount Thabor every time she approached the Eucharistic Table. Having to receive every day by her confessor's express orders, she was determined not to perform through custom or routine an act of such importance, and prepared for it not only by a continual vigilance over her thoughts, words, and actions, in order to avoid the slightest faults, but also with all the generosity of her soul studying all the movements of her heart for the purpose of adjusting them to the Divine Will. In this way she went to the altar with the dispositions of a burning seraph. Once she received her sweet Jesus she retired to make her thanksgiving, and sometimes fell into a rapture through the ardour of the charity which consumed her. Here is a proof established by the testimony of ocular witnesses, which shows us how much the Lord was pleased with the virtue of His servant. On one occasion, when she was about receiving, the Sacred Host slipped from the priest's fingers, but instead of falling, as all feared, it was for a moment suspended in the air, and then as if guided by some invisible hand, rested on Anna Maria's tongue.

And this was not the only case, for several times Jesus appeared to her visibly in the sacred form. Amongst others, while praying one day in the church of the Child God, she saw in the Sacred Host a beautiful lily, and over its flower Jesus appeared clothed in celestial splendour. She was enchanted with the loveliness of the Divine Child, and she heard a voice saying: "I am the flower of the fields and the lily of the valley: I am all thine." And Anna Maria was all Jesus'; for Jesus she would willingly have given her life. Learning from the Sacred Heart to be meek and humble, she employed these extraordinary graces to humble herself the more, to blame her lukewarmness, and enliven in her breast the flame of divine love.

We cannot love Jesus without being devout to Mary, nor be truly devout to Mary without serving Jesus with

all our heart. Animated by this solid devotion Mrs. Taigi had recourse to the Queen of Heaven, as a child has to its mother, and she called her by this tender name. She celebrated all her feasts with great devotion, she invoked her whenever she heard the clock strike, and in her conversation she tried to inflame all in love for this incomparable Queen. She also entertained a deep love for St. Joseph, and she venerated as her patrons St. Peter, St. Paul, and several other saints. A heart so well disposed and so diligently cultivated could not do less than burn with zeal for the divine glory, and so it was in reality. And this zeal which devoured her, as well for the conversion of sinners as for the relief of the souls in Purgatory, was daily increased by the new and extraordinary graces she received from heaven. There is one which we cannot pass over in silence.

VII.

Soon after her conversion she was favoured with the constant attendance of a brilliant sun in which she saw the past, the present, and the future, and could even divine secrets of conscience. She could also see the state of souls after death, and read her own imperfections, revealed by stains on the sun's surface, which disappeared on her bewailing them at the feet of her confessor. This circumstance caused her to be visited by many people, high and low, who came to consult her about matters which interested them. On one occasion she was speaking to the ambassador of France in Turin, who was then in Rome, and she recounted to him simply and unaffectedly his whole life, his private weaknesses, and the part he took in the Revolution. She also, to his great astonishment, described the intrigues of the several courts of Europe. He was a whole hour listening to her, and on coming out, with tears in his eyes, he said to the person who had brought him: "What a prodigy! what a wonder! How is it possible for a poor woman to know all these things? She is really full of divine

knowledge! The most sagacious diplomatists are mere pigmies to her." Yes, it was God who revealed those things to her to frustrate the plans of the impious and exalt the glory of His Church.

Illumined by this supernatural light, she more than once denounced the sanguinary and homicidal plans of the secret societies, and foretold the revolutionary attempts which were to take place in the pontificates of Leo XII., Pius VII., and Gregory XVI. When the servant of God saw the terrible calamities which should befall society in chastisement of its crimes, she prayed, she wept, she offered herself as an expiatory victim to detain the arm of Divine Justice, and often the Lord, accepting her generous and charitable offering, visited her with sickness, persecutions, misery, calumny, desolation, and terrible spiritual pains. And notwithstanding her sufferings she would repeat her offer whenever she saw new punishments impending.

VIII.

Her predictions were not circumscribed to the circle of her life. She foretold the coming of Pius IX. to the pontifical throne, describing the whole of his brilliant and stormy reign. She often spoke of the terrible persecutions which the Church should suffer, and of the persons who should lay aside their mask and manifest their hypocrisy in all its repugnant perversity. She asked the Lord who should successfully bear the hard trials of this period; and she was told *the humble of heart*. To disarm the divine justice and lighten the scourge reserved for our calamitous times, she introduced into her family the custom of saying after the Rosary three *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys*, and *Glory be to the Father*. The Lord also revealed to her, that after those hard trials the Church should gain such a brilliant and unexpected triumph, that men would be astounded, and whole nations would run to the bosom of the Roman

Church, the mother of true peace and prosperity. God grant that the days of bitterness may be shortened, and the aurora of victory appear.

Let us return to our devout matron's house, and observe her edifying example. It were natural, seeing how Anna Maria was admired by the great ones of earth, and visited by bishops and cardinals, to imagine that her dwelling should be enriched by the gifts of these noble personages. And, indeed, such would be the case if she had not loved poverty and refused the smallest recompense, desirous of living with her family by the work of her hands. Weaned from everything of earth, she only sought and ambitioned the riches of heaven. Maria Louisa, Queen of Etruria, an intimate friend of hers, would alone have raised her out of poverty; but the servant of God refused to go to live in the palace with her family, as the duchess desired, and determined on not leaving her humble station, she refused several other offers. The duchess one day complaining that she never asked her for anything, opened a box full of gold coin, and said: "Here, Anna, take as much as you like." The poor woman, thanking her for her good intentions, answered with a smile: "You are very simple, my lady. Thank God I need nothing, for I serve a Master richer than you, who in His bounty provides, and will provide, for all my wants." And, in fact, when her work and her family's did not meet their wants, she confidently appealed to the Lord for aid, and the Lord provided for her by clearly providential means. One day, when praying for this purpose before a crucifix in the church of St. Paul, she heard a voice which said to her: "Go home quickly, and you shall find all you want." And so it was in reality: a bank draft had arrived, sent to her from Florence by the Marquis Bandoni. She sometimes went to the doors of the rich and asked an alms, not for herself and her family, but for some poor person in want. God supplied her and hers with the necessaries of life, and she desired no more.

The holy home of Nazareth, where Jesus led an obscure and laborious life for thirty years, was the type which she tried to copy in the regulation of her own. At all hours the grateful aroma of labour, sanctified by prayer ascended to heaven from it. Let her be sewing, or washing, or smoothing, or making beds, in all her works she knew how to keep her heart united to Jesus, and offer Him the incense of prayer; nor did her labour impede her prayer, nor her prayer interfere with her labour. When the French took possession of Rome, a great drought afflicted the country, and Anna's husband lost his salary of eighteen shillings monthly, as his master had gone to Paris. Then the poor woman infused into her family the courage and confidence of which she was herself full. Though sick, and sometimes unable to leave her bed, she worked night and day making corsets and slippers for ladies. The Lord blessed her efforts, and her family never wanted anything. Her greatest pain was her inability to succour the poor as she could have wished. But still she did something to assist them. She told her children to never send away a poor person from the door without a piece of bread. She often deprived herself of it to give to them. When called to visit some sick person, she went at once, and examining her mysterious sun, either told him what remedies to employ, or exhorted him to prepare to die like a good Christian; and not seldom did she cure them by the imposition of her hands, or by giving them a medal of the Virgin to kiss. Her charity and mercy were very great.

IX.

She felt particular pleasure in visiting the hospitals, and she often brought the patients biscuits and wine; and to animate her daughters with the same spirit she would take them with her and teach them how to attend the sick. When she met on the street a poor woman badly dressed she would take her home, and after giving her

something to eat, would make her a present of some clothes. And this woman, so generous and heroic, was in her own eyes a miserable wretch, only worthy of contempt: praised and honoured by all, she only saw her shortcomings and defects. Really her heroism, united to the gift of miracles and of prophecy, would have exposed an ordinary soul to that most insidious of all temptations, vainglory, which had so enslaved her in her youth, and finds such easy access to a woman's heart; but Anna Maria was too well grounded in humility to attribute to herself the glory due to God alone. Convinced that one may prophesy and work miracles without being a saint, she looked on herself as the outcast of the world, and the most ungrateful of sinners. When she happened to be guilty of any defect, she bitterly accused herself, and with holy indignation called herself a proud, lazy, vain good-for-nothing.

From this humility sprung the respect with which she treated others, especially priests and the poor. She always reverently kissed the hand of the former, whenever she met them in conversation, and desired her children to do the same. Without this profound humility and low estimation of herself, how could she have been constantly resigned to the Divine Will in the most difficult circumstances? Her son Camillus was fraudulently drawn as a soldier in the conscription by the French, and because he was poor he had no means of escaping the service. Anna felt it very much, and was a long time without speaking from grief; but she suffered it in silence, without a single complaint against the perpetrators of the injustice. With the same peace and resignation she heard they had imprisoned her son Alexander for a mere trifle, though her heart suffered bitterly on account of it. All the many years she lived on the Corso she had in the house, though on a different flat, a woman who greatly tried her patience. Whenever she met Anna, she became like one possessed, loaded her with epithets, calumniated her, and said

everything that could occur to the mind of a woman without the fear of God. Anna calmly listened to her, spoke cordially to her when she met her on the stairs, and not seldom made her presents, as if she were her intimate friend; but all in vain, for in return she got only new insults and injuries. When praying one day to the Lord to have compassion on that woman, He answered that she should see her some day asking alms at her door. As the pious matron persisted in praying for her, that the Lord might pardon her and avert that punishment, she obtained only the following answer: "Let me chastise her in this life, that she may repent, and be pardoned in the next." The fulfilment of the first part left no doubt of the second. The unhappy woman, though she had a flourishing linen shop, soon lost all she had, and was compelled to beg alms. Her misfortune made her look with other eyes on her whom she had calumniated; and not once alone, when she came to ask help at Anna Maria's door, did she find in her a soothing consoler in her misery.

Mrs. Taigi was a heroine, not only in her mercy and humility, but in her invincible patience. To the desolation of spirit from which her mysterious sun did not free her; to the terrible temptations against faith, hope, and charity, with which the enemy afflicted her; to the persecutions of men, who tried in a thousand ways to destroy her peace, we must add the pains and torments of her crucified body. Her headaches, which were intensified on Fridays at the hour of Our Saviour's agony, were so intense that she had often to go to bed; and when her household duties would not allow her to do this, her suffering was so great that, despite her efforts and strong will, her tears would flow in torrents. She suffered in her eyes, ears, hands, mouth, and feet; but what caused her the greatest pain was the pestilential odour occasioned by the sins of the world. Her confessor came to see her one day, and asked her how she was. "In the agony of death," she answered. The

priest added : " Let us conform to the divine dispensations, and ever say : Lord, Thy will be done." The sick woman, in the midst of her pain, immediately answered : " On earth as it is in heaven." Though crucified on her bed of pain, she was the consolation, the peace, and the joy of all about her. Forgetting her own sufferings, she was interested in others, prayed for all, and attended to all. The hour of her victory, when she should go to receive the crown of her deserts, was now approaching.

X.

When attacked by her last illness, in spite of her sufferings and the pain she felt at leaving her large family almost destitute, she preserved an unalterable calm, and spoke of her approaching departure as if it were a pleasure-trip : and, indeed, there is no recreation more agreeable to a saint than to find himself at the gate of eternity, the end of his trials and exile ; as to a sinner there is no moment more terrible than that in which all his vain delights are about to end and his lasting torments to commence. Rejoicing at the pleasant perspective her virtues opened up to her, the venerable woman felt inundated with joy on seeing her poor dwelling converted into a sanctuary, for by an indult of Gregory XVI., who held the servant of God in great esteem, she not only had a daily Mass in her private oratory, but could receive the Holy Eucharist without being fasting. Two days before she received the Viaticum, she took leave of her husband and children ; she left the charge of the house to her eldest daughter, who was a widow ; and gathering them all about her bed, she spoke to them in the most feeling manner, recommending to them compliance with the obligations of the divine law, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the practice of daily reciting the Rosary in common, and, finally, making them all kneel down, she gave them a last adieu and her maternal blessing. The family withdrew with tears in their eyes, and she, also deeply moved, retired

into herself to think of nothing but of preparing for death and becoming united for ever to her beloved Jesus. After receiving the last sacraments with a devotion more easily imagined than described, she gave up her soul to her Divine Spouse, on the 9th of June, 1837. Her funeral rites were such as her virtues deserved, and by the Pope's orders, she was buried in a distinguished place in the Campo Verano. Pius IX., in view of her heroic virtues, and the singular favours obtained by those devout to her, by decree of the 8th of January, 1863, ordered the introduction of the cause of beatification of this illustrious woman.

The Lord unceasingly proposes models to people in all states of life, to proclaim by example that the way of sanctity is open to the whole world. We do not deny that there are many things in the life of our heroine which cannot be the object of our imitation; but it was not these gratuitous gifts which made her agreeable in the eyes of God, but her penitence, her poverty, her humility, her patience, and her crosses: and in this we can all follow her example, according to the measure of divine grace. What excuse can we allege for having yielded to human respect, for not being frugal and modest, for not frequenting the sacraments, for not performing the daily exercises of a good Christian; in fine, for not following Jesus Christ on the royal road of the cross? The conduct of our servant of God will always belie those who try to cloak their defects under a false impossibility. Let us walk, then, in our Saviour's footsteps, and we shall be happy in this world and in the next.

Reading from the History of the Holy Family.

FROM THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT TO HIS SENDING HIS DISCIPLES TO PREACH.

WHEN Jesus was coming down from the mount, surrounded yet by a great multitude, He was met by a leper, who threw himself on his knees, and said: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." On hearing this prayer our Lord extended His hand over him, and answered: "I will; be thou clean." And He dismissed him, perfectly cured, recommending him at the same time to show himself to the chief priest and pay him the offering which the Mosaic Law ordained in such cases for legal and medical fees. The Divine Master, on His return to Capharnaum, lost no occasion of instructing as many as approached Him. When He was one time teaching inside a house, some men brought a poor paralytic on a litter. The multitude gathered around the Divine Pastor was so great that his bearers knew not how to place the sick man before Jesus. With that it struck them to get on the roof, and thence let down the litter in front of our Lord. When Jesus saw the faith of these charitable Galileans, He exclaimed: "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Hearing this, the Scribes and Pharisees began to murmur in their hearts: "He blasphemeth. Who but God can forgive sins?" The Messiah, who, as God, penetrated their most secret thoughts, publicly answered: "Why do you think evil in your hearts? Whether is

it easier to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say, Arise and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then said He to the man sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house." And he arose, as the Lord commanded, and taking up his bed went away, giving glory to God, and the multitude, filled with astonishment, glorified the Author of such wonders.

When Jesus was leaving that house He saw by the way a publican (or tax gatherer), named Matthew, or otherwise Levi, doing business at his table, and said to him: "Follow me." And Matthew, rising up, and leaving all, became one of the most faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

When the Pasch came round, the second which Jesus celebrated during His public life, He went up to Jerusalem to comply with it. There was in this city a great bath, called Probatica, around which there were always a great number of sick, blind, lame, and paralysed, waiting for the movement of the water; for at certain times the angel of the Lord descended and moved it, and then the first who entered the bath was suddenly cured. And there was among them a certain man who had been languishing thirty-eight years. Jesus looked on him with eyes of pity, and asked: "Wilt thou be made whole?" The infirm man answered: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pond." Jesus then said: "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk." And he was immediately cured. When the Jews saw the man carrying his bed on the festival day, they took it very ill; but when they found that it was Jesus who ordered him, they were transported with rage, and resolved to make Him die as a breaker of the law and a blasphemer, for in defending Himself against their accusations He had declared that He was the Son of God. One would think that the very miracles of the Messiah, intended to enlighten and convince the blind understandings of the Scribes, only served to fill them

with malice and hatred. There was, consequently, a continuous struggle between the infinite goodness of Jesus and the perversity of the Jews, a struggle in which they must die or conquer.

About this time He received a message from some ancients, who besought Him to cure a servant of a centurion, who had built a synagogue for them. Thither went the Lord with them, and when He was near the house the officer's friends met Him, and said, in his name: "Lord, trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, for which cause neither did I think myself worthy to come to Thee; but say the word and my servant shall be healed." Withal the Centurion, who was watching, seeing that Jesus still came towards the house and was now near, went out to meet Him, and repeated the same protest of his unworthiness to receive Him in his house, and said that it was enough that he should open His divine lips for his servant to be cured: "For I am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers: and I say to one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doth it." By this He meant that the Saviour, being Lord of the universe, the very elements themselves would obey Him, like servants hanging on His lips. When Jesus heard this, He turned to the crowds who followed Him, and exclaimed: "Amen, I have not found so great faith not even in Israel." And immediately the Centurion's servant was healed.

From Capharnaum Jesus passed over to Naim, and at the gates of the city He met a funeral. They were going to bury the only son of a widow, who, weeping, followed her child to the grave. The Father of Mercies was moved to compassion, and said to the afflicted mother: "Weep not." He approached, touched the bier, and those who carried it stopped. And He said: "Young man, I say to thee arise." And the young man arose and began to speak, and was restored to his

mother. All were filled with fear, and they glorified God for it. Jesus pursued his journey, and went to the house of a Pharisee called Simon, who had invited Him to dine. When at table they were engaged in pleasant conversation, a woman presented herself, who cast herself at the feet of Jesus Christ, bathed them with her tears, dried them with her hair, kissed them with tenderness, and anointed them with aromatic oils. The Pharisee, who knew that woman's life, was scandalised at the Master's condescension, and said within himself: "This man, if he were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner." Then the Messiah questioned the Pharisee thus: "Simon, I have something to say to thee." "Say it, Master," said Simon. "A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And whereas they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which, therefore, of the two loveth him most?" "I suppose," said Simon, "he that to whom he forgave most." "Thou hast judged rightly," said our Lord. And turning to the woman, He said to Simon: "Dost thou see this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she with tears hath washed my feet, and with her hairs hath wiped them. Thou gavest me no kiss; but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but she with ointment hath anointed my feet. Wherefore I say to thee: Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less." Those who were at table with Him, when they heard these expressions, began to say within themselves: "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" And then Jesus, as if ratifying what He had said, dismissed the woman, saying: "Thy faith hath made thee safe, go in peace."

When He had visited almost all Galilee, the Saviour returned to His ordinary residence in Capharnaum,

where He was so pressed by the multitudes which flocked from all parts, that He had scarcely time to eat. On a certain occasion there was a still greater crowd. A report began to spread that, according to some, He had gone mad; according to others, that He was in an ecstasy. When these rumours reached the ears of His relatives, they went in search of Jesus. Mary, who, according to St. Epiphanius, though she dwelt in Capharnaum, followed her Son in his principal excursions, was also among the number of those who sought Him. When told that His Mother and brethren were inquiring for Him, extending His hand over His disciples and hearers, He exclaimed: "My Mother and my brethren are they who hear the word of God, and do it." Afterwards one possessed of the devil, both blind and dumb, was presented to Him, and He cured him on the spot, at which the envious Pharisees began to suggest that He did these wonders by the aid of Beelzebub, the prince of devils, and asked Him for a new prodigy, which should leave no doubt about His divinity. "If Satan," He answered, "cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; and a kingdom divided against itself shall be made desolate, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? But if I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you." Then He hurled just invectives against those hypocrites, calling them a race of vipers, a perverse and adulterous generation, who seek a sign: "And a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet; for as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." That is to say, that after being dead three days, they should see Him arise glorious again as the climax of all His wonders.

After dinner He went out to the shore of the sea of Tiberias, and was soon surrounded, not only by the

grateful women whom He had freed from evil spirits, Mary Magdalen, out of whom He had cast seven devils, Johanna, the wife of Chusa, Susanna, and others, but also by a multitude of people desirous of hearing His instructive parables.

At nightfall He embarked with His disciples in a boat to pass over to Tiberias, on the other side of the water. And as all was calm, He fell asleep in the after-part of the vessel, on the cushion they had prepared for Him. But, when least expected, a great storm arose, and the boat was almost sinking; and yet Jesus slept on. The disciples were greatly alarmed, and ran to Him, exclaiming: "Master, doth it not concern Thee that we perish?" And, rising, He rebuked the wind, and said to the sea: "Peace, be still." And suddenly the wind ceased, and the sea was calm. And the crew, filled with dread, said one to another: "Who is this (thinkest thou) that both wind and sea obey Him?" At last they safely reach the shore of the Gerasens, where He was met by a notorious man possessed by the devil, or rather by a legion of infernal spirits. When these saw Jesus, they began to cry out by the man's mouth: "What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, Son of the most High God? I adjure Thee by God that thou torment me not." And there was in the neighbourhood a great herd of swine feeding, and the devils, fearing to be cast out, besought Jesus to allow them to enter these unclean animals. The Lord gave them permission, and immediately the herd, numbering about two thousand rushed like mad things into the sea. The Gerasens, fretting for their loss, and fearing perhaps a greater, besought Jesus to depart from their territory. Jesus did not want people against their will, and therefore recrossed the sea. And when He had reached land, Jairus, a prince of the synagogue of Capharnaum, prayed Him to come and cure his only daughter, twelve years of age, who was dying. He willingly consented, and while on the way, a poor woman who had been

suffering from a flux of blood for twelve years, and had spent her all on doctors, said to herself: "If I shall touch but his garments I shall be whole." Animated with this faith, she makes her way through the crowd, she touches the hem of our Lord's garment, and is immediately cured. Soon after Jairus received the news that his daughter had just died. Our Lord looked on him with eyes of compassion, and said: "Fear not, only believe" He entered the house of the dead girl with only Peter, and James, and John, and the father and mother of the child. And He said: "The child is not dead but sleepeth." But the bystanders mocked Him, for they knew well she was dead. Jesus, taking her hand, exclaimed: "Damsel, I say to thee, arise." And He told them to tell no one, but to get Him something to eat, to their joyful astonishment.

Thence He returned to His own country, and on the way two blind men cried out with a loud voice: "Have pity on us, Son of David." In vain did He tell them to keep their cure secret, for in their joy they published it in all directions. And about the same time He freed one possessed by the devil. On His return to Nazareth, He again began to preach His heavenly doctrine to His countrymen, who could not believe their ears, and again asked one another: "Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary, the brother of James and Jude. . . .?" And then He abandoned His native country, never more to return to preach in it, thus confirming what He had already said to them, that a prophet is little honoured in his own country, and on account of their incredulity, which He had reprehended on a former occasion, He wrought not a miracle among them.





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